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## 'A Blood-Stained Corpse in the Butler's Pantry': The Queensland Bush Book Club

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# 'A Blood-Stained Corpse in the Butler's Pantry': The Queensland Bush Book Club

## **Abstract**

Lending libraries were not the norm in 1934 when the Carnegie Corporation of New York sent American librarian, Ralph Munn, to conduct a study of the condition of Australian libraries. In his initial survey Munn learned of the Queensland Bush Book Club, an organization of well-to-do, philanthropic women from Brisbane who had established a book lending service for settlers in the Outback. They hoped to ease the drudgery and lighten the burden faced by isolated women and their families in the rural areas. The antidote was a regular parcel of "proper" reading matter which included books, newspapers and magazines. They took advantage of a well-developed railway system to deliver the packages to rural families.

Testimonials found in the Queensland Bush Book Club annual reports provide a snapshot of frontier life detailing drought, fire, flood and all manner of misfortune and privation. The reports also offer specifics of the type of books the settlers requested and the gratitude with which the parcels were received. Murder mysteries were at the top of the request list, as the title of this article suggests. This article also examines the relationships forged between town and country residents around the distribution of books, and the mechanics involved in providing a book lending service before free public libraries became commonplace.

## **Keywords**

Queensland, Queensland Bush Book Club, Australia, library, libraries, history

## **Disciplines**

Australian Studies | Cultural History | History | Library and Information Science | Social History

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Robin Wagner

‘Dear Mrs. Ford,’ the correspondence often begins, then follow accounts of misfortune and privation:

During the floods our home was an inch out of the water and the river four miles wide. We lost heavily in cotton but the stock are alright, though they were standing in water 3 ft. deep for a day and ... 8 pigs lived on the verandah for two days.<sup>1</sup>

The drought was so bad that water was scarce and baths unknown. We had to do what we could with a wet sponge. But I missed vegetables most of all. Fruit one learns to do without, but the memory of vegetables used to torture me.<sup>2</sup>

We certainly had a terrible experience in the cyclone. [We] lost everything but our house. The sea rose 20 feet over high tide mark and swept through our little home, destroying everything and drowning my poultry. I took the children on to a high piece of ground and put them in the flanges of a large stump while I tried to rescue my poultry. My husband stayed at the house tying down the roof.<sup>3</sup>

It’s easy for a bloke to be pleasant at the factory ... but pretty hard when he is pulling old Strawberry out of a bog or chasing the pigs out of the sweet potato patch. And calves! Have you ever heard the raucous, nerve-splitting, bellowing of an army of desperate little demons, who begin to scream at daylight and keep it up all through the hot day?<sup>4</sup>

I’m afraid I’ve been a bit depressed because you see we mortgaged the place to feed our dairy herd and the little drop of rain last month killed most of those left.<sup>5</sup>

One might wonder what floods, drought and hungry calves have to do with books and reading in the Queensland outback. The connection becomes apparent through an examination of the records of the Queensland Bush Book Club, a Brisbane-based philanthropic organisation that operated a book- and magazine-lending service for families living in the Queensland bush in the early twentieth century. Mrs Ford served as the group’s corresponding secretary for many years, and letters detailing the hardships of life in the remote countryside ended up on her desk.

Many letters concluded with a note of appreciation for the fine work of the Queensland Bush Book Club:

My husband had to go to the township and before he could return the creek rushed into flood, cutting me off from anyone. As I was alone with my little children I knew I would have to keep vigil all night. Thanks to the Bush Book Club the horror of that night was lessened; had I not had splendid books to read I think I should have gone mad.<sup>6</sup>

## I

The Queensland Bush Book Club was already twelve years old when Ralph Munn and Ernest Pitt conducted their famous survey of Australian libraries in 1934.<sup>7</sup> The questionnaires they sent out in advance of their travels were often returned with a personal plea to the Carnegie Corporation for funding. Other letters tucked into the survey forms might describe the local library's sorry condition, express the town's interest in a free public library or extend an invitation to Munn and Pitt to visit.

One such letter sent to Pitt and dated 18 June 1934 came from Mrs FL McKinnon, Honorary General Secretary of the Queensland Bush Book Club. She begins by stating emphatically that the 'questionnaire hardly applies to the Bush Book Club and any attempt to answer the isolated questions which touch us, would I think be confusing'. McKinnon goes on to describe the Bush Book Club as

more or less a philanthropic effort. We — the women of the cities of Queensland — offer to the women of the country (and men and children also) the companionship of our books. We send to the Outback a circulating library, as an indication of our sympathy and understanding.

In several paragraphs, McKinnon sets the stage. The club circulates to the bush districts where no School of Arts library exists. It sends to every isolated district in Queensland, from the Southern Border to the islands in the Gulf, supplying 2000 families. Five hundred books change hands weekly. Books last from six months to two years, constantly travelling from reader to reader and never returning. The club spends under £40 a year on books, depending almost wholly on donations. With her letter, McKinnon encloses a copy of the Club's 1933 *Annual Report*.<sup>8</sup>

The organisation's *Annual Reports*, held at the State Library of Queensland, offer a full accounting of club activities during its 46-year history. The reports are far from a dry accounting of facts and finances. Instead, they are filled with tales of cyclones, floods, punishing heat, fires, pestilence, farm accidents and all manner of adversity, right down to a close encounter with a crocodile. They offer a vivid account of daily life in rural Queensland, before the advent of free public libraries. In addition, these records provide a snapshot of reading tastes among residents of the bush.

Interspersed with reader requests and accounts of country life are snippets of poetry and scattered quotations, on themes that reference the heroism of country dwellers. The 1933 *Annual Report* concludes with this summary of the Bush Book Club:

We are the link between book lovers in the cities with books to give, and book lovers in the country hungry for books. We are a Voice in which the city expresses its homage to the Nation Builders and we are one of the influences at work which is breaking down the wall of suspicion between town and country.<sup>9</sup>



The Queensland Bush Book Club's mission was to provide reading material to individuals who did not have access to a library. Before the establishment of public libraries, many communities supported a School of Arts, which often included a library. Members had to pay a subscription fee to borrow books.

## II

The Queensland Bush Book Club founders were a group of philanthropic women from Brisbane with leisure time for charity work and a spirit of volunteerism. They were educated women, drawn from Brisbane's upper class. Many of the original members belonged to the Lyceum Club, an organisation consisting of women who shared an interest in art, literature, music, science, education and current affairs.

Miss Margaret Ogg, chairwoman of the Lyceum, was a founding member of the Queensland Bush Book Club. She was joined by half a dozen other public-spirited women and Lyceum members, who were first inspired by a series of articles that ran in Brisbane newspapers in 1921. The articles detailed the harsh conditions in the outback and praised the settlers for their sacrifices. One particular article in the *Brisbane Courier*, entitled 'The Women of the West', paid tribute to the pioneer women and described their privations. The author called for a group to take up the cause of providing them with reading matter.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time as the articles appeared in the press, Mrs Aubrey Withers, founder of the New South Wales Bush Book Club, visited Brisbane. In an interview, she scolded Brisbane residents for having no bush book service and remarked that even the Northern Territory was supplied with books by the Australian Inland Mission.<sup>11</sup> In response, the *Courier* and the Brisbane School of Arts promised 100 books each to start a 'library'. Mrs Ormond Smith, who later became the club's president, sent £5 to the *Courier* as seed money.

The Brisbane women held their first meeting on 15 November 1921 at the old Town Hall and elected officers. By January 1922, parcels of books were dispatched to thirteen subscribers. Within a few months, Townsville women joined

in, creating a Northern branch. At the end of the first year, they had enrolled 330 members and sent out 1100 books.

The object of the club was not to compete with any of the small libraries in the country districts, but rather to be an adjunct to them, reaching out where the libraries did not circulate. The club was non-sectarian and non-political. Its mission was to maintain a supply of good literature among the settlers in the country districts, who lacked access to a School of Arts.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the founders believed themselves to be much more than merely the overseers of a lending library. At the core was a desire to brighten the lives of their country sisters and to alleviate the loneliness and dreary monotony of the bush. According to a statement in the 1932 *Annual Report*: ‘We can do nothing to improve conditions in the Bush but we can prevent the wistfulness and loneliness of a colour hungry woman, by providing her with the colour and romance and companionship of books.’<sup>13</sup>

Club members sometimes would boast of having a special affinity with their country sisters. The argument was that they were only one or two generations removed from the men and women who cleared the wilderness that was now the thriving city of Brisbane. They were, therefore, near enough to the pioneering days to know something of the loneliness of the bush. While this declaration seems a bit exaggerated, it served to accentuate a special connection with, and sympathy for, their country sisters that the city women seemed determined to draw. The women of the Bush Book Club believed they were promoting the worth, courage and endurance of the country. In their view, city residents also needed to be reminded of the country’s important contributions to Australia’s well-being.

The Bush Book Club leadership maintained that one worker in the country provided the livelihood for three in the city. The distribution of books was central to expressing the respect and friendship of the cities for the country. Members of the Bush Book Club therefore saw it as their duty to educate city-dwellers. They often referred to the club as breaking down the ‘wall of suspicion between city and country’.

A close reading of the annual reports, however, suggests two opposing messages. On the one hand, bush dwellers were portrayed as heroic, hard-working, noble and under-appreciated. At the same time, they required uplifting — they were viewed as backwards and deprived. They needed the *best* literature, and the women of the Bush Book Club would be the ones to choose it for them. This sentiment comes across clearly in the 1933 *Report*:

Our work is to keep supplied with books those men and women who are holding the front line trenches of Australian civilization — to take to them the great world of books, to people their loneliness with friends who will cheer them in depression, comfort them in trouble, rejoice with them in happiness and urge them on to greater effort in self development.<sup>14</sup>

The club women believed they were doing something of national significance in bringing to light the hardships of the men and women of the country, and providing them with the comfort of books: ‘Our work is of national importance — are we not bringing town and country into closer harmony ... Is not a drought felt by

the last person in the last little township as well as in the large cities?<sup>15</sup> The 1936 report states:

It is *not* a pleasant thought in a young country where the man on the land is an Atlas bearing the burden of the prosperity of the towns. Thus it is that the Bush Book Club has a twofold object — to distribute books as the symbol of our friendship and to educate the people of the towns to knowledge of the country's burdens and heroism.<sup>16</sup>

In summary, it was a mixture of sympathy, gratitude, education and improvement that motivated the city women to begin the work of the Queensland Bush Book Club.

### III

How did the books and magazines reach people in the bush? How did the women in Brisbane and Townsville manage to circulate 500 books or more each week to 2000 bush residents? Railroads made it all possible. Queensland had nearly 6500 miles of railways and every mile of it carried a Bush Book Club book at one time or another.

For a nominal fee of 2s 6d per year, country people were guaranteed four parcels, each with ten books and about six magazines and illustrated papers. This was considered adequate reading for three months. Parcels went from reader to reader instead of coming back to headquarters each time. If books were worn out or lost, a subscriber would correspond with headquarters and a supplementary parcel would be sent. That way, all parcels were kept to a high standard. A typical cloth-bound book would last two years, while paper-bound books had a shorter lifespan.



Parcels were sent by rail and collected at a railway station. When a subscriber finished with their parcel they would deliver it to the next family in the chain.



The Queensland Bush Book Club provided books and magazines to men living in mining and forestry camps as well as those working on road construction projects.

Parcels were issued from the Brisbane or Townsville centres, with a third centre later established in Ipswich. Readers passed on the books to each other through carefully mapped-out travel routes. For faster readers, the club would send additional reading matter out of cycle. The Northern and Southern District secretaries kept lists of their subscribers along each rail route, and maintained a card file in the office that listed each subscriber and their reading tastes, and recorded the books they received in order to prevent duplication.

Books in disrepair or those deemed too flimsy for distribution were sent to lighthouses or to various railway, road construction, forestry and mining camps as gifts, and were not part of the club's distribution program. Each of the sixteen lighthouses along Queensland's coastline received two parcels a year. Worn-out books were also sent to seaside huts run by the Country Women's Association, as well as to various missions — primarily on the northern islands — and to isolated bush schools or children's homes.

The office women exchanged letters regularly with Sister Hawkes, a bush nurse in McKinlay, who ran what could best be described as a one-woman distribution centre in the far west of the state. She provided reading matter for workmen heading 'farther out' — including shearers, stock hands, well sinkers, telegraph repairmen and itinerant agricultural workers. In one letter, she wrote: 'I have just had a crowd of shearers going a long way out for two months. They were very grateful for a bundle of reading matter as nights and weekends are long, especially since the introduction of the 40 hour week.'<sup>17</sup> The Queensland Bush Book Club kept Sister Hawkes supplied with large numbers of books and maintained a long correspondence with her.

Book distribution by rail was more difficult in Queensland than it was in neighbouring New South Wales, where the railway ran fan-wise out from Sydney. In Queensland, there were several railway systems, and they were not linked. The club created hubs at Brisbane, Ipswich and Townsville. Families would make their way



to the nearest railway station to collect their parcel, or it would be transported by carters, private vehicles or the postal service on the next leg of the journey.

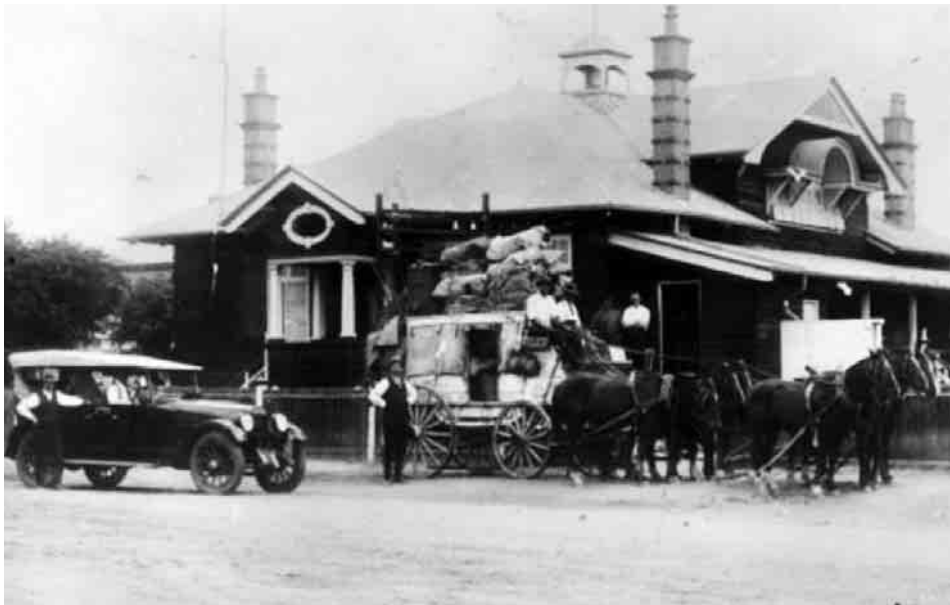
The Queensland government supported the Bush Book Club for the duration of its existence. During the Depression, the annual subsidy of £800 was scaled back to £500, but the club managed to weather this reduction by changing routes and sending less individualised parcels.

In addition to free rail transport, local carters in each of the club's centres carried the books from the headquarters to the railway stations without charge. For years, John Burke and Company carried free all parcels for the Gulf ports, lighthouses and islands on its ship, the *Wandana*. The club women formed a special relationship with the *Wandana* crew, supplying them with their own 'library' so that they would have books to read on their voyages.

A large map showing the territory covered by the Queensland Bush Book Club was said to have hung on the wall in the Brisbane office; it illustrated just how far the books travelled. Parcels went as far as Birdsville in the south and Coen in the north, and from the western border to lighthouses dotting the east coast.

The Northern Branch, with Townsville at its centre, served the territory north of St Lawrence and west to the Northern Territory border, including the Gulf Country and adjacent islands. Its parcels went to isolated sheep and cattle properties and construction camps, and to settlers on the islands and along the coast.

The Southern region extended from the New South Wales border to St Lawrence along the Central line to Longreach, Winton and Yaraka, west to Quilpie and Cunnamulla, and south-west to Dirranbandi and Texas. A journey of



Books travelled from the club offices by rail to remote areas. From the train station, the parcels of books would continue their journey by mail coach or private car. This image shows Palmer's Royal Mail Coach, Charleville, 1928.

over 1000 miles was not uncommon. For example, a parcel to Burketown actually travelled 1392 miles by rail, via Dobbryn. Many would go 600 to 800 miles by rail and then another 100 miles or more by car. One member got her books from the closest rail depot, Mt Isa, which was still 300 miles from her home.

Books travelled long distances, and because of the geography of Queensland it was seldom a straight shot. A parcel going out to Gilliat travelled 414 miles by train from Townsville, then the mailman would take it another 20 miles, where it would be carried by cart or car another 60 miles ‘to the fence’, which was then just 3 miles from the reader’s house.

Each day in the central office must have been a reminder of Queensland’s varied topography. The secretary wrote in one report: ‘We learn geography from our readers and the immensity of our State.’<sup>18</sup> One letter was accompanied by a sketch map, which showed the homestead, A, with radiating lines to three ‘nearby’ towns — 65 miles to B, 48 miles to C and another 22 miles on to D. One reader, who was asked to share books with her closest neighbour some 50 miles away, replied that while it might *look* like 50 miles on the map, the actual rail journey was 600 miles because of the absence of roads, and the range of mountains that lay between the two locations.

Deliveries to the Cape York Peninsula were especially challenging. The club considered an exchange between readers within a reasonable distance to be 50 to 100 miles. On the peninsula the nearest neighbour could be 200 miles away. In some cases, mail would come by boat to a port 50 miles away and then continue on by pack-horse. The reports from the 1950s mention deliveries by aeroplane and transport assistance from the Flying Doctor Service, but even as late as 1955 the combination of rail, motor truck and pack-horse prevailed in the Far North.



The Queensland Bush Book Club operated out of the T&G Building on Queen Street in Brisbane. This image shows the building under construction in 1923.

## IV

How were these parcels prepared for the long journey? In Brisbane, the Bush Book Club operated out of offices at No. 6 Victory Chambers in Adelaide Street. In 1924 it moved to the T&G Building on the corner of Albert and Queen Streets.<sup>19</sup> This is where women came to sort donations, mend worn books, wrap the outgoing parcels, pack and socialise. They were divided into committees and sub-committees to accomplish their work. The annual reports listed committees devoted to covering, mending, packing and censorship. The reports further noted that the women were ‘assisted by a number of girls’. This was a female-run organisation.

Preparing the packages for shipment was a social activity. One can imagine the women gathered at a large table, conversing, wrapping and decorating the parcels. The reports talk about making the packages as attractive as possible. They mention ‘scissoring out’ small illustrations and pasting them to the brown paper parcels. One report states:

We are very strongly of the opinion that the neatness and trace of personal care are valuable evidence to the Outback that the city is sincere in its admiration and that the understanding between town and country, [that] we are doing our best to foster, contains no ignoble trace of condescension. The Bush Book Club is a friendly gesture from one book lover to another.<sup>20</sup>

At its peak, the club had 2200 subscribers. However, this figure represented many more actual readers, since most families were quite large. The club needed at least 7000 books and several thousand magazines and illustrated papers per year to supply all of its readers. To keep a service like this going required capital, but not as much as one might expect. Labour came from volunteers, and for the most part reading matter was donated. The club seldom purchased new books for distribution. When it did, the cost of new items was usually under £10 per year.

In fact, the total cost of running the Queensland Bush Book Club rarely exceeded £300–400 per year. The greatest expenses were in 1965, with £509 in earnings and £565 in expenses. While this was a net loss, the club had a savings account balance of £1662 to handle the deficit. The main costs were the rent of club rooms in Brisbane, Ipswich and Townsville. There were expenses for utilities, cleaning, postage, wrapping supplies and some cartage. The secretaries in each district received an honorarium. In the post-war period, the club paid for several affiliations, including one with the Flying Doctor Service. Earnings came from donations, fundraising events and membership subscriptions. The annual membership for a bush family was 2s 6d, and remained the same for 31 years. It increased by just 1 shilling, and that was not until 1952. City subscribers could pay the same rate to help keep the service afloat, but they had no borrowing privileges.

For the most part, the club maintained a balanced budget, although there were instances of shortfalls during the Depression. The club recorded a deficit of £12 in 1928, and the 1933 report spoke of a ‘serious financial deficit of £42’. Overall, though, the organisation succeeded financially due to ample donations, voluntary labour, subsidies from the railways and cautious spending.

One has the sense that there was a free flow of women in and out of Bush Book Club headquarters, attending to their assignments, sorting books and magazines, socialising and soliciting contributions. They appear to have been successful in

obtaining donations of supplies. The reports consistently thank various local merchants and banks for twine, wrapping paper, envelopes, writing pads and the like.

To raise money, club women planned teas, fêtes, garden and card parties. Bridge and mah-jong parties were mentioned frequently. Some were private affairs by invitation only while others were public events. Accounts indicate that a typical fête might raise £50 while a card party might bring in £10. The office in the T&G Building was also the location of the annual Book Day, held each June. The community was invited for refreshments and asked to bring book donations. A typical Book Day brought in between 1500 and 2000 books, and about 500 magazines.

It is worth noting that the women of the Bush Book Club set a high standard when it came to the condition of donated books. They praised Book Day donors for their generosity on the one hand, but scolded ‘unpleasant people who clear their book shelves of rubbish and brightly remark “That will do for the Bush Book Club”’. This was personal: ‘Books are our ambassadors for the creation of a better feeling and deeper understanding between town and country and we would not have them tattered in appearance or mean in spirit.’<sup>21</sup>

When not working in the club rooms, the women were out in the community, seeking donations and raising funds to keep operations going. They organised many private garden parties, normally at the home of a club member or a well-connected community member, where guests would bring books or monetary donations. Social occasions were also hosted by their patroness, who was always the wife of the governor in office at the time. For example, Lady Blair held a musical at Government House, which netted the club £11.

The annual reports list regular contributors, including the Walter and Eliza Hall Trust (a Sydney-based charity), the Rotary Club and the *Brisbane Courier*. The Victoria Leagues of Edinburgh and Glasgow also sent books.

Other groups organised book drives on behalf of the Club, including the Lyceum Club, the Victoria League of Brisbane, the Brisbane Club and again the Rotary Club. Sometimes private citizens had book parties at their homes, which might net 150 books. Other charitable groups arranged athletic tournaments to benefit the club. Members, and particularly club officers, were expected to raise at least £2 personally. This might add up to another £50 for the coffers.

Fundraising had its ups and downs over the lifespan of the club. It fell off during the Depression and again during World War II. In 1941, for instance, the Bush Book Club made no public appeal, because it did not want to compete with other war-related charities. Citizens who ordinarily donated to the club instead sent their used books to organisations collecting reading matter for soldiers. Wartime shortages meant an increase in book prices. Many people stopped buying books for themselves, and therefore did not have volumes to donate.

By the mid-1940s, book donations began coming from sources other than individuals. Schools of Arts offered their discards. Reports from the 1950s mention donations from public libraries. The club also became the beneficiary of estate gifts, which might net 400 to 500 books or small amounts of cash.



Books were one of the few pleasures in life, and often the only relief from constantly battling the elements. This image shows the Evans house and cow yard under water during the 1922 floods in Central Queensland. Winton was a community served by the Bush Book Club.

## V

With money and books in hand, the women of the Queensland Bush Book Club set about distributing the precious volumes to eager rural readers. The annual reports provide a vivid account of conditions in the Queensland bush and offer details of the pioneers' daily toil. Excerpts from readers' letters generally filled one or more pages of each slim report, and were often a litany of trials and tribulations.

Weather was a constant theme. During the wet season, recipients in North Queensland were often cut off for three months or more at a time. As late as 1951, the club got this letter:

This is our first complete mail for ten weeks. All through the wet our only mail has been brought by a pack-horse which, of course could only carry letters and small parcels. How we are looking forward to a good read.<sup>22</sup>

When parcels did make it through, they were often casualties of the weather. 'I am so sorry the books were damaged. Our house was blown over in the cyclone and all the books were soaked with rain,' wrote a correspondent in 1946.<sup>23</sup> Another wrote of coming home to find water 5 feet deep had been in the house 'and everything smelt and looked just awful, including your books, which we will try and clean'.<sup>24</sup>

In some parts of Queensland, flooding was a way of life: 'We have been deluged and flood-bound having missed eight mails. The dam broke its banks; I was awakened at 2.30 a.m. and told to get out quickly as water was 2 foot high in the house.'<sup>25</sup> Another testified: 'All our dams were washed away and half our old home with its contents floated away like corks. But we are well and ... will get the books in as soon as possible.'<sup>26</sup> Another said: 'Your parcel arrived just prior to our having 101½ inches of rain—some luck, eh?'<sup>27</sup>

If it wasn't water it was drought: 'Our selection has not had enough rain to fill a water tank for seven years.'<sup>28</sup> Lack of rain forced many off the land. The 1924 report states: 'In November and December we lost a number of readers whose grit and determination had been defeated by drought.'<sup>29</sup> In 1928: 'Drought has driven many men off the land and the large group in the Bouli district, once fifty members strong, has been almost entirely dispersed.'<sup>30</sup>

For those who remained, it was a physically demanding existence. Some women lamented that bushfires kept them too exhausted to read. Another wrote: 'We have no heart for reading with stock dying all around us.'<sup>31</sup> Yet another observed: 'We are too tired after a day of scrub-cutting to do anything but fall into bed.'<sup>32</sup> Others detailed the hardships of caring for a large family:

I must give up my membership as I have a new baby to care for, making five children under six years of age. We are living in caravans, camping on the job, dam sinking and I have nowhere to keep books and no time to read. I have to teach correspondence lessons to the eldest and cook for several men as well.<sup>33</sup>

A woman wrote from a mining camp:

The club is a genuine comfort to me. I get so little time to myself that I have kept the parcel nearly a year. I am sorry to have to tell you that I have to work so hard that it is very difficult to do much towards learning the children their spelling. I have so much sewing to do, making shirts and trousers for the miners and mending the bags,



For settlers living in remote areas without neighbours nearby, the parcels of books provided by the Queensland Bush Book Club offered one of the few recreational opportunities in a life that was otherwise filled with toil and hardship.

the smallest hole in the bags and the tin would run out in no time, much the same as rice would do.<sup>34</sup>

The monotony and isolation were real, and books were often a woman's only company. One woman reported that she had not seen another woman in eleven months. Another wrote to say that she was 80 miles from the railway, had to travel 10 miles to meet the mailman, and was weeks at a time alone with children. She expressed her appreciation for every aspect of the parcel, right down to the wrapping paper, which she ironed out and read. This letter came from North Queensland:

The mailman lost his horse and we didn't get the parcel for three weeks after it had been sent. The men and the children don't seem to mind these delays but I was sick with disappointment ... I love human companionship and sometimes feel the complete isolation terribly.<sup>35</sup>

Another reader described the Bush Book Club as one of the 'kindest and best thoughts' to have happened: 'It is very lonely when one has nothing to read and nothing to think of but starving sheep. You see a book takes you out of yourself and leaves you something to think of afterwards.'<sup>36</sup> The arrival of a parcel was a break in the drudgery of women's lives. One reader wrote:

I am terribly tired tonight but I must tell you about the arrival of my parcel. I had to take three small children and the washing a mile and a half to the dams, as all the house tanks are dry. I washed and watched the children and when I returned, the untidy house met my gaze. The three children were tired and oh so dirty ... The unwashed breakfast things looked so hopeless, and I was pretty tired of it all. Then your parcel came and I just sat down in the middle of the mess and read *Punch* and *New York Life* — thank you, thank you for including them — until the world looked bright pink.<sup>37</sup>

The country dwellers may have been isolated, but that did not mean they were uneducated. Australia in the early twentieth century had an impressively high literacy rate.<sup>38</sup> Many of the 'pioneers' had come from towns with bookshops and a School of Arts. They carried their habit of reading into the bush.

The subscribers were both men and women. Their children were often enrolled in correspondence school or taught by their mothers. Reading had both recreational and educational value. Judging from their requests, many bush residents were well read and had wide-ranging tastes, from popular novels and adventure tales to more serious books (Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was among the most frequently requested titles): they wanted both Deadwood Dick and the classics. A notice board in the club office posted a 'wanted' list for unusual titles, and a waiting list for those in high demand. HG Wells' *Outline of History* always topped the waiting list. One reader requested Dante's *Divine Comedy* in English, French or German, adding that if the Bush Book Club had books in ancient languages, he found Greek much easier to read than Latin. Another asked for translations of the French and Russian classics. Poetry was popular, and there were regular calls for Keats, Shelley, Burns, Tennyson, TS Eliot and Shakespeare.

As a counterpoint to their daily lives, subscribers asked for romance, adventure and mystery: 'I enjoy a murder; I like a blood-stained corpse in the butler's



For settlers living alone, the arrival of a parcel could mean entertainment after the day's work was done. The Book Club charged a nominal fee of 2s 6d per year, which guaranteed four parcels, each with ten books and six magazines and illustrated papers.

pantry.<sup>39</sup> Not surprisingly, Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie and Edgar Wallace were much in demand. Ethel Dell's popular romances and Elinor Glyn's more saucy women's fiction topped the list for subscribers, who requested: 'Love stories please — because you get all the other things in real life — but not love stories.'<sup>40</sup> There were also readers who requested a combination: 'Please send a little bit of love for me and a murder for my old man.'<sup>41</sup>

The club supplied literary classics by authors such as Dickens, Tolstoy and Cervantes, while Alexander Dumas, John Galsworthy, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Bernard Shaw and Sir Walter Scott were much requested. There was greater demand for popular British novelists than US writers. On the request list were AEW Mason, Ian Hay, WW Jacobs, Arnold Bennett, May Sinclair, Mrs Henry Wood, PG Wodehouse and HG Wells. Louisa May Alcott, Ernest Hemingway and Zane Grey topped the list of US authors.

The club also dispatched plenty of non-fiction — mainly history, travel, elementary science and nature books. *Captain Cook's Voyages* was popular, as were all books on exploration. Bush residents asked for books on Greek, Roman and Egyptian gods. In his essay on non-fiction publishing in the first half of the twentieth century, John Arnold, describes the popularity of certain genres of non-fiction, particularly natural history and locally published writings on the outback. Authors mentioned in the essay include Donald Macdonald, Thistle Harris and Charles Barrett. Even more popular were the historical and travel books of Ion Idriess, Frank Clune and Ernestine Hill.<sup>42</sup>



Bush Book Club records show that Idriess's works were much in demand. Requests for *Flynn of the Inland* and *The Cattle King* appear frequently on the waiting list. One reader wrote to the club:

Please give me any Australian novels dealing with the outback. I want to learn all I can about the country I am beginning to love. I have just read *Flynn of the Inland*. It is such men as he who make Australia a great nation.<sup>43</sup>

In their study of rural reading in post-war Queensland, Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove discuss the popularity of Australian literature and maintain that rural readers — at least those they interviewed — were drawn to local authors. The rural readers in their study recalled series like the Billabong books and Digit Dick adventures as important childhood reading. Many identified more strongly with Australian works than with British and US books, and cited Rolf Boldrewood, Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson as authors who were read aloud in their country homes.<sup>44</sup> This identification can also be found in club correspondence, with a subscriber writing: 'We are hundreds of miles from a library. Our choice of books is non-fiction and travel chiefly, but actually we read anything and devour Australian books.'<sup>45</sup> Besides Ion Idriess, the club's other commonly requested Australian writers were Walter Murdoch, Ethel Turner, Kylie Tennant and George Essex Evans.

Surprisingly absent from the record were appeals for practical books. One might have expected requests for books on agriculture, machine repair, livestock management, mechanics or other useful arts. Yet only one such request stands out. A boy interested in motors and engines was sent a steady supply of *Popular Mechanics* magazines over the years. He later wrote that he had secured a position in a country town garage and sent the club his first pay cheque in appreciation.



Woman washing her hair, Queensland Outback c. 1924.

Sometimes the advice sought by readers went beyond the literary recommendation. In fact, Mrs Ford may have been one of Queensland's first reference librarians, judging from the range of questions that came her way. She always tried to help her readers. One wanted to know how to adopt a child. Another requested directions on how to weave a basket from ornamental reeds. A young man asked for a recipe for strawberry jam: she found him one. He responded gratefully, and then asked if she might put him in touch with 'a suitable young lady about 21'.

Club women often referred to themselves as 'guides, philosophers and friends' to those in the bush. In terms of guidance, they saw it as their responsibility to carefully screen all the books they sent out. A censoring committee was designated to remove books considered unsuitable. Their guidelines were to weed out anything 'objectionable or too sophisticated. For our books must pass the test of mother and father, and growing boys and girls.'<sup>46</sup> Reading matter had to be healthy and wholesome.

This moral overtone was in keeping with the prevailing attitude of the day. In her work on literary censorship, Deana Heath discusses in detail the pervasiveness of Australian censorship from 1904 onwards. Various forms of censorship were sanctioned by the government and led by the Department of Customs. Any work that unduly emphasised matters of sex or crime, or that might encourage depravity, was banned. This could include medical books displaying body parts, books on preventing conception, information on abortion or miscarriage, or novels with sexual scenes or references.<sup>47</sup>

Originally directed at imported — mostly British — literature, censorship soon expanded to include new Australian literature with sexual themes. As Heath explains, 'for many years the system kept out knowledge of what was going on elsewhere in the world, particularly in relation to changing notions of sexual morality and alternative political models'.<sup>48</sup> The women of the Bush Book Club were simply following the conventions of the day.

Morality was not the only ground for censorship of a book. The club women took pride in their elevated literary tastes and were determined to send out 'only the best literature'. Reports mention that when putting together a parcel, one should choose 'better reading' first, followed by romances, thrillers and Westerns. At a time when trade unionism, labour unrest and Communist Party activities were increasing in Queensland cities and towns, the club made sure that writings on such themes were removed. Bush Book Club officers disparaged certain unnamed Australian authors, calling their works 'neurotic emotionalism' and their plots 'desperate Russianized situations', and describing their pages as filled with 'festering human hates'.<sup>49</sup> They commented that the socialist plots of new Australian fiction writers bore no similarity to the real lives of noble country readers.

## VI

Despite the censorship, country customers appeared to be satisfied customers. Memberships were renewed year after year. When a family dropped out, it was less a matter of displeasure and usually due to economic hardship. One subscriber wrote: 'Strange as it may seem I am not able to pay the subscription and cannot

ask for more books. We have lost our crops through hail three years running and I simply cannot ask my husband for money.<sup>50</sup>

Others could not make a living in the country, and returned to towns. In some years it would be reported that 300 subscribers had left the country, but another 300 had not only taken their place on the land but also joined the Bush Book Club. A letter excerpted for the 1950 *Annual Report* read: 'I have just taken over this farm and written on the wall of the house I found your address. Would you tell me please how to become a member?'<sup>51</sup>

Robust membership was just one sign of satisfaction. Another was the longevity of the readers. The Queensland Bush Book Club served multiple generations of families over many years. For example, upon the death of an elderly subscriber in 1947, the record showed that she had received 96 parcels in her lifetime — more than a thousand books and hundreds of magazines and papers. Her son was a member, and *his* son had just received his first children's Christmas parcel from the Queensland Bush Book Club. They represented three generations and 26 years of membership. Another woman, writing to cancel her membership in 1964, indicated that the family was moving to England. They had received their first parcel in 1928. In another testament to longevity, a subscriber observed:

The children are now grown up and earning their living. Many thanks for the books, which for years lightened our labours and helped us over many a dreary wet day and which taught the children the King's English much better than any local association could do. One of them has done a lot of broadcasting and another has written poetry — and been paid for it too! I do not think their literary tastes could have been fostered in the bush, had it not been for the parcels of books to which they turned on return from the cow yard or cotton field.<sup>52</sup>

The correspondence suggests that the club also met its goal of bringing cheer to the bush and helping to alleviate loneliness: 'I have been eight years in the Bush without seeing a town and for two years have not been beyond the paddock fence, but I can go round the world with Curle, enjoy palaces and courts with Lord Frederick Hamilton and live the love story in Ethel M. Dell's novel.'<sup>53</sup>

How did gender, class and race figure in the Queensland Bush Book Club story? While bush subscribers were both male and female, the bonds that formed were primarily among women. The majority of the correspondence was between women, and support for one's sisters in the bush was a stated goal. Much attention was drawn to women's loneliness and toil, and the goal of helping to lift that burden through books and friendly letters. The corresponding secretary, Mrs Ford, bore a large measure of this responsibility. She was the chief correspondent with the women in the bush, serving in this role for 33 years. The original intent of her position was to communicate information about the parcels, but these communiqués invariably turned into a body of sociable correspondence that went on for decades. Women remarked that they felt she was their friend — and, by extension, so were all the women who volunteered in the club.

Ford wrote several hundred letters annually to subscribers in the early years. By 1939, the hundreds of letters had become more than 1900 annually, and remained at that level until she retired in 1957. She communicated on a personal basis on

topics that mattered to women. A paragraph in the 1927 *Annual Report* amplifies the gender connection:

An over wrought woman can write to the Secretary and feel better for unburdening her mind; a proud mother will recount little Willie's villainies with gusto, or send a snapshot of jolly boys and girls. There is a sense of belonging to one another between the women of the Committee and the women of the Outback, and should a reader demand advice on knitting jumpers, or the best medical book for a young mother, or what creepers to grow on a veranda, someone will be able to give expert advice ... And there is always a member of the Committee handy and willing.<sup>54</sup>

While arranging the delivery of a parcel, Mrs Ford might at the same time drop a note inquiring about a child's health. Subscribers complimented Ford on her personal touch. 'You write so wonderfully that I had got into the habit of thinking I was the one and only recipient of your beautiful kindly communications,' wrote one woman from the outback.<sup>55</sup> Ford and the other office correspondents sought to create a personal connection. A country woman writing about a long-anticipated visit from her sister ended with: 'I believe I've told you everything we did, and said, and I don't even know that you'll be interested, but somehow I feel you will, because you remembered the name I gave my baby.'<sup>56</sup>

While the bonds between women were obvious, there was also an unmistakable class division. Well-to-do city women in Brisbane and Townsville had the leisure time to attend garden parties, orchestrate fundraisers and select the best literature to uplift the downtrodden bush dwellers. These women occupied a higher status than their country sisters, which in turn entitled them to attach a kind of heroism to the lives of country folk. Readers of the Bush Book Club's *Annual Reports* were constantly called upon to demonstrate their admiration and appreciation for the women pioneers.

Occasionally, comparisons were made that suggested the women in the city were a mere generation removed from the hardships experienced by country dwellers — in short, they were all really the same. In reality, however, their country sisters probably would not have been welcome at a Bush Book Club card party or musical entertainment at Government House. Despite the rhetoric of appreciation, the lines were clearly drawn: one group of women (city) was helping the other, less fortunate (country). One group had means and the other did not.

In terms of race, the Queensland Bush Book Club was a group of white city women helping predominantly white settlers. This was not a book-lending service for the Aboriginal population. A call for book donations emphasised that: 'We want the best you have for these magnificent Australians — men and women carrying on often in the face of fearful odds ... and remaining cheery, brave, determined and so grateful for friendships.'<sup>57</sup> It is important to note, however, that these friendships were intended for *white* Australians. The Queensland Bush Book Club was interested principally in serving the white pioneers and white residents of the bush. In fact, at times it appeared that book-lending was aimed at rescuing white settlers from the loneliness of being surrounded by Aborigines. In one report, the secretary writes: 'To be the only white man amongst hundreds of a coloured race, is to appreciate the Bush Book Club to the full.'<sup>58</sup>

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders got the discards, with tattered books being sent to the missions. One report explained that cases of cast-off books were packed every month for the islands north of Thursday Island, including Darnley, Yorke, Moa, Murray and Badu: 'In most cases there is only a handful of whites with a coloured population of several hundred.'<sup>59</sup> When books went to such communities, they were gift parcels rather than loans. Recipients of 'gifts' paid no subscription fee and were expected to be grateful for the donated packages. The 1954 *Annual Report* mentions a large number of parcels going to deserving organisations: 'Among these are the Church of England Missions on Cape York Peninsula at Lockhart River, near Portland Roads, also the Mitchell and Edward Rivers in the Gulf.'<sup>60</sup> Deliveries to Aboriginal missions at Coen, Croker Island (in the Northern Territory), Weipa, Mapoon and the Palm Islands are also referenced.

When it came to serving Aborigines, the *Annual Reports* conveyed a patronising tone. One account described the delivery of book parcels to the Croker Island Mission and receiving a hand-made shell brooch from the appreciative native children.<sup>61</sup> Mrs Ormand Smith reported that gift parcels sent to isolated bush schools were met with a 'special gratitude'. For most of the club's history, the Aboriginal population was ignored, if not excluded. When Aboriginal people were recipients of the Bush Book Club's largesse, it was in the form of discarded materials or books carefully selected as appropriate for their presumed interest and intelligence.



The Queensland Bush Book Club saw donations of books diminish during the war years. Books ordinarily given to the club were instead donated to organisations collecting books to send to the soldiers. The Red Cross solicited books for soldiers, as shown in this book depot float from 1944.

## VII

Membership in the Queensland Bush Book Club began to decline during World War II. In 1941, it was down to 1100 families on the roster; by 1944, membership hovered at 1000. Country men left for war, and their wives and children moved to town to live with relatives. The club curtailed its requests for donations so as not to compete with war charities. The 1942 *Annual Report* noted that evacuation, illness and war work were taking a toll on the committee. The women who usually came to the club offices were now assisting the war effort in activities ranging from Red Cross service to civil defence work. The offices were open less frequently. When the Townsville corresponding secretary left, there was no volunteer to take her place. Mrs Ford assumed all secretarial work for the North and South Districts.

Petrol rationing affected deliveries too. John Burke and Company, which had been carrying parcels free since the beginning, had to withdraw its concession. The difficulty of getting tyres and petrol put other carters out of business. Readers living a long distance from a train depot had no way to get their books from the station. In addition, book donations dried up.

Membership inched above the 1000 mark in the 1950s, but never regained its pre-war strength. When the Queensland Railways closed a number of branch lines in 1960, the club lost more subscribers. Membership slowly declined until the club folded in 1967. In the post-war decades, telephones and televisions helped put a dent in isolation. New regional libraries were established in country districts, and the Queensland Bush Book Club surrendered those readers, recognising that it had helped to foster a love of reading and in all probability had facilitated the formation of new rural libraries.

Other readers naturally fell away because of old age or new mobility. A member of 30 years wrote in 1954:

Thank you for many happy hours of reading I have enjoyed as a member of the Bush Book Club, especially in the early years when I was forty miles from a neighbour. We have sold out and are going to live in town so I will not want the books again.<sup>62</sup>

A man of 89, who also had been a subscriber for over 30 years, wrote to say he was getting too old to read. A reader of 20 years' duration wrote to say he was going into a home because he could no longer live alone.

Membership was declining, and so were the numbers of volunteers at the centres. The women who had begun the Queensland Bush Book Club were an increasingly elderly population. They retired or passed away. The annual reports of the 1950s and 1960s read like obituary columns in a newspaper. There was no group of young women with leisure time to replace the original volunteers, and the sense of a close-knit social club was all but gone. When Mrs McKinnon and her successor, Mrs Goldsmith, stopped writing the *Annual Reports* (in 1948 and 1960 respectively), the reports took on a new, businesslike tone. The stories of country life and reading tastes, the snippets of poetry and inspirational quotations disappeared from the printed record.

In the post-war years, the method of book distribution also underwent change. While the original circulation model of passing parcels among bush families was still employed, there was an upsurge in groups making appeals for the

Queensland Bush Book Club to send them books that they could keep. These included the Red Cross, the Irrigation Commission, industrial farming settlements, hostels, prison farms, children's homes and other groups hoping to establish their own on-site libraries.

The club's lending practices in the final years signalled a step towards encouraging community libraries. In 1951 it was recorded that:

We have recently made a new contact which we feel is important and hope next year to enlarge in scope. For the past year we have been sending books to a tutor on a large Company owned station in South Western Queensland. First it was only children's books which were asked for ... to encourage a love of reading in the young ones. Gradually we have added magazines for both the men and their wives and these are so much appreciated that the owners are establishing a staff library. Our packages are still going out for we feel there is need for all. We are gratified to think that we have been pioneers of something which may grow to much greater proportions.<sup>63</sup>

The last *Annual Report* in 1966 states:

We are conscious of the fact that the number of our subscribers is not increasing and that possibly the years of our usefulness to the country people will come to an end. Better roads, the establishment of many regional libraries in the country, as well as cars, radio and telephone all help remove the isolation of earlier years, and though loneliness will still exist, communication in most areas is becoming easier and more frequent.<sup>64</sup>

In early 1967, the club disbanded.

## VIII

The lasting effects of the Queensland Bush Book Club were fourfold.

First, it reached an otherwise ignored constituency at a time when there was no other book-lending service to remote communities. There were no government-supported libraries in these remote rural areas until well into the 1950s. The Queensland Bush Book Club filled this void. It set about to identify isolated families and distributed thousands of books — growing from seventeen subscribers and 100 books to supplying 25,000 books a year.

Second, it forged a bond between women of the country and those in the city. Perhaps it wasn't the two-way street that many of the women imagined, but the women in Brisbane and Townsville — those on the receiving end of the correspondence — did learn much about conditions in the bush. It is equally apparent that the women in the outback formed a strong bond with the city, judging from the voluminous correspondence attended to by Mrs Ford and the other corresponding secretaries.

Friendships were created and nurtured, even if primarily by mail. 'I would like to thank you for your letters and your books,' began one reader. 'My husband's mother must have been one of your first readers and she often spoke of the Club. It added such an interest to her life. I think she was the finest type of pioneer.' The writer goes on to say that her mother-in-law, who was born near Cunnamulla, probably did not know a dozen women intimately in all her life. She went to

Brisbane only twice. She adds: 'But please don't pity her, because she was the happiest woman I know.'<sup>65</sup> She continues:

One parcel you sent almost at the beginning had three books which still contained the name of the giver with a little message from her. It was the name of a well known Brisbane woman, and my mother-in-law always felt as though she was a personal friend. When the Brisbane papers came she would search the social columns for news of her friend, and was happy for the day if she found her dress described at the races or at a party. I often begged her to write to the lady, but she was too shy. In some of the books I notice that the names of the original owners have been cut out. Do leave them in in the future because some lonely woman may make a friend in the same way.<sup>66</sup>

Third, the Queensland Bush Book Club helped to lay the groundwork for the establishment of public library service in rural areas. In a very real way, the club cultivated a reading habit over the course of 46 years, touching thousands of individuals. It hooked people on reading and continued to serve them until the formation of regional libraries in country centres. Over time, the club women came to regard themselves as pioneers, whose work eventually would be taken over by local libraries. In its final years, the Queensland Bush Book Club worked closely with the Public Library County Extension Service, especially when it had inquiries for books it could not supply. When the club closed shop in 1967, it left behind a more literate rural constituency ripe for the introduction of state-supported libraries.

Finally, judging from the excerpted correspondence, the Queensland Bush Book Club had an impact in upgrading people's cultural experience. Life in the bush was dreary, monotonous and extremely hard work. There were no recreational opportunities for most of these families, other than reading. The club filled this emptiness. Country people did not travel — most of them had never been to Brisbane. Their travel was in the books provided by the club. One reader wrote:

I have to thank you for the wonderful holiday. I haven't been away for many years but I travelled far and wide with the last parcel.

The perfect holiday they say combines escape inwards with escape outwards, but when the latter is not forthcoming, it is still possible to obtain the escape inwards — for a member of the Bush Book Club anyway. I have had the most entrancing holiday, visiting Java with Winifred Ponder. I have been admitted to Farthing Hall and watched the development of a romantic love story and enjoyed the domestic difference of two very likeable people. I have joined Lord Peter Wimsey in his pursuit of a murderer ... and positively swaggered up and down the Spanish Main in the wake of Captain Blood.

Now I am going back to my mending and banking and cleaning with heaps of new friends and much to think about and many incidents to laugh over. It's a wonderful thing to laugh. Such a pity that one so soon forgets the trick of it surrounded by miles of parched brownness and dazzled by heat haze, with the dreary knowledge in the background of dying cattle and overworked men-folk — But I feel ever so refreshed with new things to think and talk about.<sup>67</sup>



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Thanks to the State Library of Queensland for permission to use Images 1 and 3–10, and to the Gold Coast City Council's Local Studies Library for Image 2.

## Endnotes

- 1 OM78-47, Queensland Bush Book Club Records, John Oxley Library (JOL), State Library of Queensland, Brisbane, Annual Report (AR) 1928.
- 2 JOL, AR 1927.
- 3 JOL, AR 1934.
- 4 JOL, AR 1939.
- 5 JOL, AR 1926.
- 6 JOL, AR 1934.
- 7 In 1934, Ralph Munn was invited by the Australian Council for Educational Research and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to conduct a survey of Australian libraries and report on their state and condition. He travelled throughout Australia with Ernest Pitt, Chief Librarian at the State Library of Victoria, from June through August 1934. They authored a report entitled *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for Their Improvement* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1935).
- 8 State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, MS 9596, Box 1, Folder 17, Bush Book Club of Queensland.
- 9 JOL, AR 1933.
- 10 JOL, AR 1930.
- 11 JOL, AR 1930.
- 12 Schools of Arts, like Mechanics' Institutes, Literary Institutes and Athenaeums, played an important part in the life of Australian communities. Among their roles was the provision of libraries and reading rooms. They also provided lectures and adult education. The libraries were open to members who paid an annual subscription, which allowed them to borrow books. The collections in most Schools of Arts were primarily fiction. The 'librarian' in charge often doubled as custodian, secretary and billiard marker. Many Schools of Arts had an adjoining games room, which generated income to keep the library afloat.
- 13 JOL, AR 1932.
- 14 JOL, AR 1933.
- 15 JOL, AR 1935.
- 16 JOL, AR 1936.
- 17 JOL, AR 1948.
- 18 JOL, AR 1939.
- 19 The club continued to operate out of the T&G Building until 1942. It was ejected from this location without much warning, possibly because the space had been requisitioned for war-related work. One writer in the 1943 Annual Report refers to a 'frenzied search' for new headquarters. Club headquarters ended up back at Victory Chambers, where it remained until 1964.
- 20 JOL, AR 1929.

- 21 JOL, AR 1936.
- 22 JOL, AR 1951.
- 23 JOL, AR 1946.
- 24 JOL, AR 1956.
- 25 JOL, AR 1954.
- 26 JOL, AR 1956.
- 27 JOL, AR 1936.
- 28 JOL, AR 1928.
- 29 JOL, AR 1924.
- 30 JOL, AR 1928.
- 31 JOL, AR 1952.
- 32 JOL, AR 1952.
- 33 JOL, AR 1954.
- 34 JOL, AR 1924.
- 35 JOL, AR 1924.
- 36 JOL, AR 1935.
- 37 JOL, AR 1926.
- 38 The Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Yearbook Australia* 23 (Canberra: ABS, 1930), p. 319 quotes data from the Census of 1921, From 1871 to 1921, the proportion per 10,000 of the population of Australia able to 'read and write' advanced from a little over 6000 to nearly 8500, while that of those able to 'read only' fell from about 1100 to under 30. *Yearbook Australia* 37 (Canberra: ABS, 1946–47), pp. 226–7 explains that 'The Census and Statistics Act 1905–1938 specified Education as a subject for inquiry at a Census, but does not indicate the nature or range of the information to be furnished. The Census and Statistics Act 1946 ... provided for the omission of read and write, but under the system of compulsory education the number of persons in Australia who reach maturity without being able to read and write is very small, and this question was omitted at the 1933 Census.' *Australians, Historical Statistics* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987), p. 339 has a bar graph comparing Census data from 1861 and 1921 on children aged five to fourteen. In 1921, about one in 10,000 Australian children were unable to read. These figures do not include Indigenous people, who were not counted until 1971.
- 39 JOL, AR 1947.
- 40 JOL, AR 1930.
- 41 JOL, AR 1953.
- 42 John Arnold, 'Reference and Non-Fiction Publishing', in *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, eds Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), pp. 282–97.
- 43 JOL, AR 1951.
- 44 Denis Cryle and Betty Cosgrove, 'Rural Reading or Reading Rural: Everyday Print Culture in Post-War Queensland', *Queensland Review* 8 (2001): 55–64 at 60.
- 45 JOL, AR 1953.
- 46 JOL, AR 1924.
- 47 Deana Heath, 'Literary Censorship, Imperialism and the White Australia Policy', in *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945*, pp. 69–82.
- 48 Heath, 'Literary Censorship', p. 82.

49 JOL, AR 1939.

50 JOL, AR 1939.

51 JOL, AR 1950.

52 JOL, AR 1939.

53 JOL, AR 1930. 'Curle' probably refers to British writer Richard Curle (1883–1968). Primarily known for his scholarly writing on Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy, Robert Browning and other authors, Curle also wrote a number of adventure tales, including *Wanderings: A Book of Travel and Reminiscence* (1920); *Into the East: Notes on Burma and Malaya* (1923); *Unchanging Fez* (1925); *Caravansary and Conversation: Memories of Places and Persons* (1937); and *The Atmosphere of Place: Little Pictures from Five Continents* (1945).

54 JOL, AR 1927.

55 JOL, AR 1928.

56 JOL, AR 1938.

57 JOL, AR 1941.

58 JOL, AR 1930.

59 JOL, AR 1930.

60 JOL, AR 1954.

61 JOL, AR 1952.

62 JOL, AR 1954.

63 JOL, AR 1951.

64 JOL, AR 1966.

65 JOL, AR 1926.

66 JOL, AR 1926.

67 JOL, AR 1936.