

The colonial collections of northern and regional Tasmania

There still exists today five principal library collections from the colonial days of northern and regional Tasmania, of which large, though varying, portions of each remain relatively intact:

The Library of the Bothwell Literary Society (est. 1834), acquired by the QVMAG Library in 2017.

The Christ's College Library, Bishopsbourne (1846 - 1856), now held by the Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania.

The Evandale Subscription Library (est. 1847), first acquired by the QVMAG Library in 1947, and consolidated in 2013, with later additions from 2014-18.

The Launceston Mechanics' Institute Library (est. 1842) is now held by the Friends of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute and the Launceston Library of Libraries Tasmania.

The Longford Library and Reading Room (est. 1857 as the Longford Subscription Library), acquired by the QVMAG Library from 2014-18.

Collectively, the collections provide us with an insight into what the citizenry of various strata of early northern and regional Tasmania society read in either the pursuit of knowledge or as a form of recreation and leisure; the collections are today a tangible link to the earliest generations of (European) Tasmanian society.

The Bothwell, Evandale, Launceston Mechanics' Institute and Longford libraries were all subscription libraries that formed part of the first generation of community libraries in Tasmania.

These subscription libraries operated in Tasmania up until the 1940s before being swept away by the Free Library Movement, which implemented free public library access across the State.

The colonial collections held by QVMAG Library

The following QVMAG Library collections were either working libraries which belonged to 19th century institutions, the personal collections of notable identities, or are an amalgam of items collected over many years.

The Bookplates Collection

Containing 1,063 volumes (as at 13 January 2021), the Bookplates Collection is essentially an Association Collection made up of items bearing many and varied bookplates, inscriptions and stampings. Bookplates and inscriptions generally date from the late 1820s through to the earliest years of the twentieth century, with the majority of items displaying plates and markings dating from the second half of the 1800s.

The Bookplates Collection is the QVMAG Library's only colonial collection that was not an entity during the nineteenth century. Established in 2013, it has since grown by way of donations and purchases from a large and varied number of sources. The bookplates and inscriptions derive from many places across the state, but in particular from northern Tasmania. Plates and inscriptions bear the names of individuals or organisations, both defunct and still active, such as libraries (where the surviving remnant is insignificant in number), churches, religious organisations, colleges and schools, &c.

The Bothwell Literary Society Library (est. 1834)

The Library of the Bothwell Literary Society today numbers 1,507 volumes, 99% of which was generously donated to the QVMAG Library in July 2017 by the Central Highlands Council. The Bothwell Literary Society established the first community-based library in a regional Tasmanian town; this came by way of a resolution at the Society's meeting of 7 July 1834. Initial acquisitions were obtained either by way of donation, in lieu of subscription fees or by purchase from unnamed London booksellers. An initial, sizeable donation was made by Capt. Patrick Wood of Dennistoun, Bothwell, who was in Scotland when the library was mooted. He purchased 130 volumes, some secondhand, in Edinburgh and donated them to the collection.

By the 1840s, the Library had begun to make considerably more local purchases. The Library's 1856 catalogue listed 553 titles, many of which were multi-volume publications. At the end of the nineteenth century, the collection was outdated; 1892 saw the last major acquisition, with the donation of 81 books by the MLC for Derwent, Walter Gellibrand.

The Convict Collection

This remarkable collection of 31 volumes once served time as part of the 19th century penal system that operated in Tasmania. Many of the collection's items are bibles and books on religious instruction and were used to guide convicts on the path of reform.

The volumes held by the QVMAG Library were located at a number of stations: Port Arthur, Salt Water River Probation Station, Impression Bay, Cascades Probation Station and within the Convict Department itself. A further two volumes were,

according to what written provenance exists, used at the 'Ross Prison Station' (that is, the site of the present-day Ross Female Convict Station Historic Site).

An additional 40 surviving volumes of the Tasmanian convict libraries are held by other Tasmanian public collections: TMAG holds 17 volumes; TAHO 18 volumes; Launceston Library 1 volume; Port Arthur Historical Site 4 volumes.

The QVMAG Library also holds in its Bookplates Collection a handful of books from the Port Arthur Subscription Library and Reading Room. These items were more likely offered to prison officials and their families to loan and were not used by convicts as part of their rehabilitation.

The Deloraine Public Library

There is little published history regarding the Deloraine Public Library, which opened on 3 October 1859 after a public held on 5 August 1859 called for the creation of a committee to purchase books. The Library lacked a proper building for many years, and in 1875 another public meeting resulted in the Library being managed by a committee representing subscribers and the town council. Sometime in the late 1870s, the Library was most likely moved from its dilapidated squat at the Post Office to the Town Hall. Under the Libraries Act of 1943, the Library became part of the State Library Service in 1944.

QVMAG Library's collection of ex-Deloraine Public Library books dates mostly from the 1880s, with total holdings numbering 64 volumes only: this most probably is the only significant remnant in existence today. One book bears the stock number 1,766, which implies that potentially thousands of books have succumbed to the ravages of time. Of the 64 volumes held, 58 were probably passed into the collection of the Launceston Public Library, probably sometime in the early 1970s. They remained forgotten, buried within the Launceston Library's Victorian & Edwardian Collection for at least four decades until 2014.

The Evandale Subscription Library

The remains of the collection of the Evandale Subscription Library today number 922 volumes, 53 of which are held in the Glover Collection. A large percentage of the collection dates from the very earliest decades of the Library's existence and the great majority of surviving volumes were published prior to the twentieth century. QVMAG Library holds 495 volumes that were acquired by the Evandale Subscription Library from July 1847 to the end of 1861, or about 16% of all acquisitions for the first 14 and a half years. The 495 volumes represent 53.68% of QVMAG Library's overall holdings.

Significantly, QVMAG Library holds: 1. The Library's catalogue and loans register from July 1847 to the end of 1861 (when the collection was reclassified); 2. The Library's catalogue from late 1861, up to its disbandment in 1947. These items form the nucleus of Keith Adkins' research on the Library, presented in the book, *Reading in colonial Tasmania: the early years of the Evandale Subscription Library*, published in 2010.

Founded on 14 July 1847 by the Reverend Robert Russell, the Library's collection was established by way of donations from members of the Evandale community, including Russell, John and Sarah Glover and Dr James and Mrs Mary Kenworthy.

Development of the collection ebbed and flowed over the course of 100 years until, by 1947, it had dated and fallen into disuse and disrepair. At this time, the collection numbered 2,700 books of 'general interest' plus about 1,900 novels. Most of QVMAG Library's holdings were acquired in 1947 from what could be salvaged from the collection's remnants.

The Glover Collection

QVMAG Library holds 53 volumes that belonged to the colonial landscape painter, John Glover. Three other Glover books are held by Libraries Tasmania and another six volumes are known to be held privately.

John Glover was the largest single donor of books to the Evandale Subscription Library upon its commencement in 1847, with many more of his books entering the Library after his death in 1849. All of the volumes within the Glover Collection were part of the Evandale Subscription Library, with many of them bearing the Library's markings.

The Longford Library and Reading Room

Published history on the Longford Library and Reading Room is also scant. It commenced life as the Longford Subscription Library in October 1857 and was reconstituted as the Longford Library and Reading Room in 1882. The Library likely joined the State Library Service in the 1940s under the Libraries Act of 1943 (official records held by TAHO for the Library appear to end in December 1938).

Of the 660 ex-Longford items held by QVMAG Library, 144 bear the stamp of the Longford Subscription Library, which, over the course of 25 years, appears to have accumulated a collection of a little over 700 volumes. Faster collection growth commenced at the time of the Library's reconstitution/re-establishment; steady growth was maintained up until at least 1910, when QVMAG Library's holdings cease. By matching stock numbers with publication dates and, in some cases, stamped accession dates, trends in collection development over 50 years can be traced with reasonable accuracy. All but two volumes of QVMAG Library's holdings were passed into the collection of the Launceston Public Library, probably sometime in the early 1970s. The books remained forgotten, buried within the Launceston Library's Victorian & Edwardian Collection for at least four decades until 2014.

The Reed Collection

Henry Reed was a prominent individual of early Launceston who, with his second wife Margaret, built up a large personal library, a healthy portion of which today remains in private hands at the Reeds' Mount Pleasant Estate, just outside of Launceston.

The QVMAG Library's holdings of the Reeds' library consists of 120 volumes, most of these belonging to serialised titles: the largest holding is for the *Methodist magazine* from 1778 to 1836. Almost all of the titles held represent the Reeds' religious and evangelical leanings. The collection held by QVMAG Library came from the Uniting Church in the 1980s.

The colonial collections held by other organisations

The following two collections of colonial northern Tasmania are held by organisations other than QVMAG Library:

The Christ's College Library, Bishopsbourne (1846-1856)

The collection that stood at Bishopsbourne, near Launceston, has been held by the Morris Miller Library, University of Tasmania, since 1999, when the entire library collection of Christ College was transferred to the University. About 2,500 volumes from the collection at Bishopsbourne have survived; today, these form part of UTAS Library's rare book collections.

Christ's College was founded in 1846, primarily as a result of the initiative of Lieutenant Governor Sir John Franklin and his wife Lady Jane.

The library was started immediately upon the College's creation, with many donations received from the Franklins, John Philip Gell (the College's first Warden) and Francis Russell Nixon (first Anglican Bishop of Tasmania), as well as Oxford and Cambridge universities. The Library's catalogue of 1848 indicates Christ's College Library held 1,614 titles: included in this count was a good number of pre-1600 imprints.

The College in its incipient form suffered from mismanagement, especially financial maladministration, and was disbanded in 1856. The library was relocated to Hobart, where it followed the college from location to location and through one incarnation after another until the Library's transfer to UTAS in 1999.

The Launceston Mechanics' Institute Library (est. 1842)

The Institute was established in March 1842 and operated a library, initially, for the use of members. Up to 1889, the collections of the Launceston Book Society (1840-43) and the Launceston Library Society (1845-88) were added to the Institute's library. In 1929, the Institute's name was changed to the Launceston Public Library.

Today, over 22,000 book volumes and 221 periodical titles that were acquired between 1842 and 1945 still survive; many thousands of these items go back to the earliest decades of the library's operation. The Mechanics' Institute collection is a window into the reading tastes of Launcestonians of the 19th and early 20th centuries and is one of the few such Australian Mechanics' Institute collections relatively intact and still in existence today.

The collection of the Institute is today held by Libraries Tasmania (including the Launceston Library) and the Friends of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute. The Launceston Library holds many hundreds of volumes as part of its reference and local studies collections, as well as a smaller number of volumes which were original donations to the Launceston Mechanics' Institute by notable identities of the day.

Just over 22,000 volumes from the collection are now held by the Friends of the Launceston Mechanics' Institute: 10,800 fiction books, 9,665 non-fiction books and 221 periodical titles (1,585 volumes).