

## Miss Ann Tovell

Ann Tovell, who died on 16 March 1999 after a long fight with cancer, left medical historians an invaluable legacy. About forty years ago Miss Tovell was appointed research assistant to the curator of the British Medical Association, Victoria (now a branch of the Australian Medical Association), working in the early years with Dr Bryan Gandevia and then Dr David O'Sullivan. Since most of the AMA's historical material was lying unsorted and gathering dust at the Association's headquarters, their task was to catalogue it.

At first Miss Tovell worked closely with the curators, but as they became increasingly occupied with other work, she assumed responsibility for classifying and indexing and later, expanding the holdings. She devised a system of filing the manuscripts, photographs and other records in numbered envelopes which were ordered and cross-indexed according to author and subject. It is an unusual system, but as anyone who has used the archives soon discovers, it was extremely thorough. *Historians can use the archives confident in the knowledge that they are not overlooking important information.*

The archive includes reminiscences, letters, typescripts, photographs and reprints of papers and addresses which reveal different facets of the development of medicine in Australia. Medical education and work, the development of specialisation, the impact of wars, and the interests of medical practitioners, can be seen within both a professional and a wider social setting. Miss Tovell knew the material intimately, and could supply details from memory, thus providing a personal touch as well as shortening or focussing the early stages of research for those new to the field of medical history.

Dr O'Sullivan reports that she meticulously checked all details to ensure they were accurate, an important feature of any reputable archive. Her knowledge, built up over the years, was phenomenal according to Dr Gandevia, who also attests to her conscientiousness and deep interest in history. However, Miss Tovell was not especially interested in publishing the results of her own research, and Bryan Gandevia believes she much preferred the historiographic record side of her work. In this capacity she was an important co-author with Bryan Gandevia (and others) of bibliographies of Australian medical history, for which she undertook most the of finding of references and related tasks.

The outcome of Miss Tovell's interest and energy is an extensive and continually surprising archive, containing resources which would otherwise have been lost or difficult to locate, let alone consult. The AMA library was recently dispersed and this archive, now bearing Ann Tovell's name, is held in the Brownless Medical Library at the University of Melbourne.

I only met Ann Tovell briefly more than ten years ago, in the course of post-graduate research. She was already ill and only working part-time. Her trust in giving me unrestricted access to the archive was refreshing in the hushed world of official archives. In those files I found material I had not even imagined or dared hope existed. It was exciting and exhilarating, and I have never forgotten how wonderful it was to use that archive, even after Ann Tovell retired, taking with her the atmosphere of enthusiasm and interest that was so invigorating.

Nevertheless, the archive stands on its own merits, so that some years ago, when the fate of the AMA library was being discussed, everyone agreed that Ann Tovell's archive was irreplaceable and of inestimable value—one that should be preserved at all costs. That is a wonderful legacy.

Monika Wells  
Medical History Society of Victoria