

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor,
BSANZ Bulletin.

Dear Sir,

The devastating bushfires which raged through the Adelaide Hills on Ash Wednesday, 16th February, 1983, struck with disastrous effect on St. Michael's House, Crafers (on the Mt. Lofty Summit), including in its path of destruction one of the finest theological libraries in Australia. The library building was totally destroyed and not one of its 40,000 volumes was spared.

The historic and architecturally important buildings had been bought by the Bakewell family in 1879 and extensively added to in 1880, 1895 and 1902. They were taken over by the Society of the Sacred Mission in 1946 and further extended in 1959 and 1967. The latest addition, the refectory, was the only building which survived the disaster. Curiously, it was from this building that the residents had first fled when the fire descended upon the idyllic hills retreat. All seven occupants, including two guests, escaped with nothing worse than minor burns, although their final dash to safety (after forty minutes of being trapped inside the building) led them past a flaming staircase.

Among the books and periodicals destroyed were some of unique and priceless value. The library had contained an exceptional collection of rare books, including 243 volumes (140 titles) printed before 1801. (Records of these items have been preserved by the Australia and New Zealand Early Imprints Project.) In addition, there was a collection unique in Australia of books on the religious and monastic life, personal piety and prayer (some 2500 books, many of them irreplaceable), sermons (some 800 volumes) and some rare Australiana. The collection of 2000 biographies included the stories of Anglican and other church divines and missionaries, as well as many first editions of works by early Australian colonists, missionaries and explorers, and books of Australian songs and ballads. Politics and economics were also strongly represented.

The oldest books were a work of Erasmus (1512), a Roman Missal (1512), a volume of Lucretius (1515), and a work of George Agricola (1533). There were two Geneva ('Breeches') Bibles (1600), one of which had come from Lord Nelson's flagship. Among the unique items relating to Anglican divines were early editions of John Jewell, Jeremy Taylor (1647), and Richard Baxter (1652), Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655-1673), and the diaries of Archbishop William Laud, 'written in the Tower' (1695). Other treasures included hymn-writer John Mason Neale's altar book (an ornamental Gothic edition of the first Anglican communion order), and a magnificently illustrated coloured glossary by A.W. Pugin on the Gothic revival (1846). There was an almost complete set of the classic collection of Early Church Fathers, J.P. Migne's *Patrologia*. Among the

runs of periodicals destroyed was a complete set of the Primitive Methodist *Bible Christian Magazine*, which was believed to have been the only complete set in the world.

The commercial value of the total collection would have been about a quarter of a million dollars. The real value, however, was in the information contained within the covers of the volumes destroyed. Since much of it was unique and irreplaceable, the world has lost many priceless treasures. The institution itself, established and administered by the Society of the Sacred Mission, is to be re-established on a site yet to be determined in the Melbourne area (a decision made already in 1982 but now hastened by this catastrophe). The person chiefly responsible for the establishment of the library and for its building-up into the fine collection it eventually became was Antony Snell. The present librarians Joseph Kinsela and Jean Wilson, along with other members of the Community, now have before them the arduous task of creating from nothing a new library collection to undergird the work of the new institution. The constant reminder of what has been lost will make that not only a slow but often (one suspects) a painful task. Any individual or library wishing to assist in the rebuilding of the library collection is invited to send a donation to: The Society of the Sacred Mission, c/o The Prior, St. John's Priory, 14 St. John's Street, Adelaide, S.A. 5000.

Yours faithfully,
(Rev.) Trevor Zweck,
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