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Windows into Melbourne bookshops

Booksellers' labels

Booksellers' labels were printed in a variety of colours and designs throughout the life of their particular enterprises. The shops themselves stocked a range of specialisations from popular to scholarly and radical, religious, second-hand, children's and educational.

ELIZABETH JUNE TORCASIO

libraries, for example a collection of Sydney booksellers' labels from Edmonds Book Gallery catalogue held at the State Library of NSW, and representing 54 booksellers. The State Library of Queensland holds an 'amateur's collection'.

I too, lured by labels, own a small collection. Particular labels point to Melbourne's rich bookshop heritage and its network of connections.

Although there are collectors at large, I have not yet encountered people trading labels. Many of my labels may be valued at 50 cents each plus the cost of time searching for them (which would be difficult to quantify). Occasionally I will pay \$5 for a book because of an unusual or hard-to-get label, which would then make that label worth at least \$5.

There are numerous labels still available for some shops, but others are quite rare. Substantial enterprises such as Cheshire's, Halls, Robertson & Mullens were long-lived, thus many

of their labels are still available. The Book Lover's Library and Andrade's were smaller and older businesses, with few books still extant, and their labels are scarce.

The condition of a label is another factor in determining a value. The following illustrations in the context of their bookshops show examples of labels in pristine condition, and others less than perfect.

Cole's Book Arcade began as a bookstall in the Eastern Market in 1865, later moving to spacious premises in Bourke Street, and finally closing in 1929. Edward William Cole, both 'modern' and eccentric, met his wife by placing an advertisement in a newspaper for a suitable woman. He promoted his belief in the 'brotherhood of mankind'. His Arcade stocked popular reading matter and irresistible drawcards were its distorted mirrors, orchestra, and caged monkeys.

The left-wing Book Lovers' Library,

Magic Easements
BOOK SHOP
29 Carpenter Street
Middle Brighton
92 2569

Booksellers' labels evoke recollections of long-closed bookshops. With 'sale or return' legislation in the early 1970s labels became impractical. However collecting them is popular – as evidenced by small bleached spaces where they have been removed, and sometimes, parts of pages torn out.

The State Library of Victoria has a significant collection of over 2,000 specimens (some as early as 1845) donated by former bookseller John Holroyd. There are several other collections housed in Australian