

“THE CHOOSING OF A PROPER HOBBY”:
SIR WILLIAM CROWTHER AND HIS LIBRARY¹

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On 8 April 1964 Dr William Crowther handed over to the State Library of Tasmania his collection of books, manuscripts, photographs, works of art and objects. The ceremony was attended by the Premier of Tasmania, Eric Reece, the National Librarian, HL White, and many other luminaries. Sir John Ferguson, a friend for thirty years, was too ill to attend, but wrote a tribute which was read at the ceremony. In his own address, Dr Crowther said that

The increasing expectation of life and tendency towards a shorter working life, makes the choosing of a proper hobby a matter of vital concern to every man. It is immaterial whether this takes the form of specialised use of the hands or of the mind, so that when the dread day arrives and retirement has to be accepted, another avenue of usefulness to the community is open to one.²

He was not the only person to describe the building of this extraordinary collection as a “hobby”. A few days later HL White wrote to him:

I also knew from my visit to your home, as early as 1943, how successfully you had integrated an absorbing but exacting hobby with a full and successful professional life. But again I did not appreciate, until I listened to Dr Craig and yourself, how personal and intimate the whole business of collecting had remained. You must indeed be the last of your kind, as was suggested in relation to your “general practice” of medicine.³

I want to explore some of Crowther’s personal characteristics and some of the other influences which led to the formation and ultimate disposal—but not the dispersal—of his collections. I don’t need to offer a full biography of him. Others have written of his life, but a few details will be useful.

William Edward Lodewyk Hamilton Crowther was a proud fourth-generation Tasmanian whose great-grandfather, Dr William Crowther, had arrived in Hobart in 1825. Like his great-grandfather, his grandfather, his father, an uncle and his son, he was a medical practitioner. The lives and activities of his ancestors—which embraced not only medical practice but also politics, business, anthropology and military service—were of abiding interest and pride. He served with distinction as a medical officer commanding a field hospital in France during the First World War. After his return to Hobart in 1919 he was essentially Hobart-based, travelling often to the Australian mainland but never further afield than New Zealand. He led a busy life of professional and public service, involving himself in medical politics and administration, continuing military service, museum administration (he was a trustee of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery for fifty-five years and was instrumental in establishing the Van Diemen’s Land Folk Museum at Narryna, in Battery Point, in the 1950s) and active participation in learned societies ranging from the Royal Society of Tasmania to the Royal Australian Ornithologists’ Union, the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club and ANZAAS.

¹ I thank St John’s College at the University of Sydney and its rector, Dr David Daintree, for offering me the time and space to complete this paper.

² *Proceedings at the handing over of the Crowther Collection of Australiana by Dr WELH Crowther 8 April 1964* (Hobart, State Library of Tasmania, 1967), p.[21].

³ HL White to Crowther, 22 April 1964. Crowther correspondence files, State Library of Tasmania.

Although Crowther was the only real collector in his family, he was initially influenced and assisted very much by his elders. Late in his life, aged eighty-seven, he recorded his reminiscences, from which I'll quote extensively. Asked when he began collecting, he replied:

I can't give you a firm answer to that question. I think it was inborn in me, and as long as I can remember my father, who was a most understanding man and who had a knowledge of how to treat young people, he used to interest me in this and that, and having done that, he bought a big Baltic pine cupboard for me for what he called our curiosities.⁴

His father

...never collected anything himself. He was generous to the last degree. He'd give anything he had away. And I think he helped himself liberally on my behalf from his unfortunate patients. I'd have been scared to show him anything I valued, I think.⁵

Of one of the great rarities of his collection, Henry Savery's *The hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, he recalled that

one day my father brought it home on a Sunday morning, some patient had given it to him or he'd acquired it, and I put it in my collar drawer, and it was still in my collar drawer when I came back from the AIF.⁶

More generally, older people were an important influence in Crowther's life, both as a boy and, he recalled, as a medical practitioner:

...I used to love the company of old people and my old patients, I used to leave their visits if possible to last thing in the afternoon, when I wasn't in a hurry, and I could give them a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes or half an hour to talk over whales or something like that, when I'd finished the professional side.⁷

These visits were not entirely altruistic. Speaking of his interest in the history of whaling, he said

...one used to go into the cottages [of] one's patients, and there were no international wars in those days [he is talking here of the mid-to-late nineteenth century], and most of the young Tasmanians who didn't have independent means, if they wanted to see the world they went on a whaling trip, and came back in a year or two, perhaps got five pounds as their share of the spoils, but they used to bring back whales' teeth which were the perquisite of the crew. After you took a sperm whale the teeth were pulled out and they were distributed among the crew and they could decorate these and make trophies of them and bring them back to their girls when they came. So gradually I found the collection of whaling data enormously interesting.⁸

By data, he didn't simply mean information. These visits resulted in important acquisitions, in particular parts of the outstanding collections of scrimshaw and of whaling logbooks now in the State Library.

We will see that Crowther's collection was built very largely from book-dealers' catalogues and from local dealers and auctions. But his status in the Tasmanian community offered

⁴ Crowther, Sir William, "My collections"; *three interviews with Ken Gilmore* (Hobart, Brian Rieusset, 1974/2006) (hereafter "My Collections"). Recording 1, 00:40.

⁵ "My Collections", recording 1, 3:30.

⁶ "My Collections", recording 1, 7:50

⁷ "My Collections", recording 1, 26:35

⁸ "My Collections", recording 2, 36:55

opportunities which might not have been available to other collectors (in particular, perhaps, to his great rival Henry Allport, whose collection came almost entirely from catalogues and dealers). People offered material to Crowther because they trusted him. I offer two examples. In 1954 an elderly lady living in the Hobart suburb of Sandy Bay wrote to him:

...Some time if you are down this way I would like you to come in. I have found in going through some old things a charcoal drawing that might interest you...I am trying to give a few old things to people who really care for them...⁹

And in 1955 he was corresponding with the owner of a copy of an exceptionally rare work, *Old time echoes of Tasmania*, the printing of which had been almost entirely destroyed as the result of a libel action. The owner wrote:

...If you are still interested in it. Put your own price and I will be pleased to accept your value on it...I would much rather that you had it for your collection of books than it happened to be brandied [sic] about by dealers.¹⁰

He was scrupulous in these dealings. He recalled:

...say I'd find a Tasmanian almanac of the 1820s which was very rare and quite valuable and I could have had it for a pound but I wouldn't have enjoyed it if I'd cheated the person so I'd say to her write to the Mitchell, ask what they'd give you for it, which she did or he did, and they'd say twenty pounds, and I'd show her the letter and she'd say that's more than I expected and I'd be quite happy to part with it for that. And so I'd get away with it and assuage my conscience.¹¹

But book dealers were, of course, of great importance in building the collection. Crowther had had some contact with the London dealer Francis Edwards during the First World War. After the War Edwards became Crowther's prime supplier outside Australia for several decades. In about 1920, as his interest in collecting developed Crowther sought advice from Kenneth Binns, then head of the Australian section of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library. Binns's advice (in those pre-*Ferguson* days) was to acquire a copy of the Australasian catalogue compiled by EA Petherick and issued by Edwards in 1899. Crowther did so, and took the increasingly heavily annotated catalogue with him on his visits to bookshops for many years.

He also bought from a wide range of other dealers in the UK and elsewhere, though his interest was sometimes simply in acquiring their catalogues. He had an especial admiration for Maggs's catalogues, and took pleasure in reading them, noting items already in his collection and comparing prices. He recalled that

There's no greater pleasure than receiving a catalogue and sitting down to it and ticking off the things you think you'd like to have and writing off for the one or two that you really can order and then wait—the suspense of whether or no you'd get it. Oh, it was great fun.¹²

Closer to home he took every opportunity to buy widely; but he built up especially strong relationships, extending beyond the merely commercial to friendships, with Harry Muir in Adelaide, James Tyrrell in Sydney, and Doris Eddey and HA Evans in Melbourne. It was Evans who was responsible for introducing Crowther to Sir John Ferguson.

⁹ Ethel M Nicholls to WELH Crowther, 4 November 1952. Crowther correspondence files, State Library of Tasmania

¹⁰ CL Willes to WELH Crowther, 23 May 1955. Crowther correspondence files, State Library of Tasmania

¹¹ "My Collections", recording 1, 24:00

¹² "My Collections", recording 1, 21:40

Although Crowther was a reasonably systematic collector, opportunity and chance were also significant factors in his acquisitions. He feared that this in some way limited his collection, writing to his good friend, the Sydney collector George Mackaness, that "...My own interests have been reasonably wide but I have never followed them up as you have done. Nor have I the extraordinary flair that you possess of assessing the situation & then finding what you want...".¹³ And referring to the Tasmanian Clifford Craig (who, as a neophyte collector in the late 1930s, was encouraged and instructed by Crowther), he wrote to Mackaness that "He is like yourself armed with a plan for finding material not by chance but by effort...".¹⁴ He thought, with perhaps undue self-deprecation, that Craig was

...the most important figure in collecting Tasmaniana probably in the last fifty years. I mean, I should rate him above myself, and I know a fair amount about this business. He made a science of it, and specialised, and collected and exchanged all over the world, and he's amassed an extraordinarily good collection.¹⁵

Craig's collection was sold at a landmark auction in Launceston in October 1975.

Crowther was also a markedly companionable collector. In Tasmania he maintained close contact in person and by correspondence with collecting friends including Clifford Craig, Professor E Morris Miller and the local historian Karl von Stieglitz. But perhaps feeling somewhat isolated in Tasmania, he also relished his correspondence with, and especially his visits to, collectors and dealers—largely in Sydney and Melbourne, but occasionally further afield. George Mackaness I've noted, and he was perhaps Crowther's principal correspondent and confidante. He also exchanged frequent letters with Sir John Ferguson in Sydney and with EE Pescott in Melbourne.

These contacts could take him into new collecting fields. Ferguson in Sydney and Bishop Herbert Williams in New Zealand encouraged him to collect works printed at the nineteenth-century mission presses in the Pacific. Pescott turned his interest towards the works of James Bonwick. Closer to home, his friendship with Joan McLennan (private secretary to the Governor of Tasmania, Sir Ernest Clark) led him to collecting bookplates and book labels. And his interest in the published accounts of the Canadians exiled to the Australian colonies following the rebellion of 1837-38 led to a long-lasting and friendly correspondence with the Toronto bookseller Dora Hood.

And that brings me to a most important point. Throughout his life intellectual pursuits were important to William Crowther. His focus was initially on anthropology, encouraged first by his father (and perhaps by the less savoury example of his grandfather William Lodewyk Crowther, who had been involved in the competitive dismemberment of William Lanney, the supposed last full-blood male Tasmanian Aborigine). Later, when he went to Melbourne to study medicine, he encountered Professor Richard Berry. This led to much field work and writing as well as the formation of two substantial collections. One was of Tasmanian Aboriginal stone implements, which Crowther presented in 1948 to the Australian Institute of Anatomy—since, as he wrote, "there was an abundance of Tasmanian material at Hobart and very little at the federal capital"¹⁶. The other was of crania and other skeletal material from Tasmanian Aborigines, as well as a group of Thylacine skulls, which he presented to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 1963.

But his interests soon turned to history—of medicine, of his family and especially of whaling. His involvement in the books and other materials he accumulated was therefore not merely

¹³ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 18 April 1952. MS534, Mackaness Papers, National Library of Australia (hereafter "Mackaness papers")

¹⁴ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 29 April 1952. Mackaness papers

¹⁵ "My Collections", recording 2, 17:40

¹⁶ WELH Crowther, "On the formation and disposal of a collection", in *Papers and proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, 1949, p.84

that of a collector. His was a working research collection, both for himself and for others; and eventually he would see it as a research collection for the entire Tasmanian community.

His historical interests, indeed, influenced his collecting. Although he had acquired whaling logs and also some papers of Captain James Kelly early in his collecting career, he was generally disdainful of manuscripts. But he recalled the impact of John Ferguson's offer of information from manuscripts in his own collection:

It was too late for inclusion in my article, but that showed me the value of manuscript, and since then I've never scorned manuscript, because sooner or later its value is extreme. A chance mention in a contemporary letter will put you onto – give you a clue to something you've been searching for, for years.¹⁷

Well before Crowther's collection came into public hands, both he and it were regarded as major resources for students of Tasmanian history. Thus, for example, Professor Max Crawford wrote to him from the University of Melbourne in 1950:

One of my graduate students...is considering a proposal to do some writing on the history of Bass Strait. I believe you know more about this subject than anybody else known to me, and I have therefore decided to write to you for your advice on this proposal...
Could you advise me from your own knowledge of the subject whether you think it feasible for Miss Stretton to go ahead? If you do think it is worth her while, would you be so kind as to allow her to see the material in your own library?¹⁸

His strong views about Tasmania's past both influenced his collecting and brought him into conflict with his friend Karl von Stieglitz, a prolific writer of local histories who delighted in unearthing the seamier byways of Tasmania's history. Crowther wrote to him that

My principal objection to them [that is, the seamier byways] is that they tend to confirm the modern world in the belief that people like you and I are the heirs of a sordid disgraceful era, and still glory in it by regaling & recording such incidents. Apart from this I find a tremendous interest in the sterner & harder side of life in VDL & admire profoundly the community which evolved from it—so orderly, mannered & capable of what they did in the two wars...¹⁹

Perhaps as a result, his collection was markedly bereft of material relating to convicts and the transportation system. Indeed, he recalled that, as a boy,

By and large I was never interested in the establishment, I mean the convict side of life, there was so much of extraordinary interest otherwise. Mount Wellington just at your back door and the Derwent at your front door, and your school-fellows, and there was always something to do.²⁰

By the early 1950s, when he was entering his mid-sixties, Crowther was beginning to think about the ultimate disposal of his collection. A combination of influences, examples and personal circumstances led him to consider the State Library of Tasmania as its most appropriate home.

¹⁷ "My Collections", recording 2, 40:10

¹⁸ RM Crawford to WELH Crowther, 17 March 1950. "University of Melbourne", Crowther correspondence files, State Library of Tasmania

¹⁹ WELH Crowther to KR von Stieglitz, 6 February 1957. Series 2/9, CHS 72, von Stieglitz papers, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

²⁰ "My Collections", recording 1, 2:48

One problem was his health. In 1951 he spent several months in Sydney for a knee operation. The knee continued to trouble him for many years. In 1953 Bell's Palsy affected his vision but could not keep him away from his books. As he wrote to Mackaness,

I have occupied myself with repairing or rather making more presentable a number of my books – mostly the paper covered ones for which I have provided back strips in coloured binders cloth – a few of them look very good & it has kept me content...".²¹

This led him to him taking up evening classes in book-binding at the Hobart Technical School. (And somewhere along the way he also managed to acquire and use the book-binding tools of George Rolwegan, a leading Hobart binder of the mid-nineteenth century).

His wife's own ill-health obliged Crowther (who still had a busy medical practice) to take on much of the housework, with a consequent impact on his ability to do the reading, research and writing which he loved. When George Mackaness suggested a new project, his response was

No George, mon ami, you speak of my having plenty of time to write a bibliography of Tasmania. It would be a hard task if I had a decent leg on which to stand in reasonable comfort. As it is I have to earn my living each day & have no real leisure.²²

David Scott Mitchell was perhaps the first and leading example of philanthropy in Crowther's mind. In 1936 he had visited the exhibition of treasures mounted in the Mitchell and Dixon Galleries to mark the centenary of Mitchell's birth. His article for the Hobart *Mercury* concluded that

...It will be probably many years, if ever, before such another exhibition is arranged, and one leaves with feelings of profound reverence towards the man who gave these treasures so freely to his fellows and of gratitude to the trustees and officials of the Library who have with rare taste and discernment, displayed them for inspection.²³

In February 1952 Crowther met a collector who was already in the process of transferring his collection to State Library of Victoria. As he reported to Mackaness,

...A week ago I was in Melbourne & met JK Moir for the first time & spent 3 hours at his home going over his books – He has a fine collection & is an example to all of us in his unselfish use of his library and his generosity to his State – He has done a great work in Melbourne.²⁴

Mackaness himself might initially have served as an example; referring to his collection, Crowther recalled "...the hint you gave me that it would remain as a whole and serve the community from the University [of Sydney]..."²⁵. In the event, Mackaness's collection was dispersed by Angus & Robertson through a series of catalogues issued in 1967-69, and Crowther eventually acquired a couple of items from it.

And nearer to home, Crowther was clearly influenced by his friend and patient William Walker, who presented his collection to the then Public Library of Tasmania in the 1920s and '30s. Crowther regarded the Walker collection as the Library's

²¹ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 20 April 1953. Mackaness papers

²² WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 14 April 1957. Mackaness papers

²³ WELH Crowther, "Some treasures of the Mitchell Library". C12,558, WL Crowther Library, State Library of Tasmania.

²⁴ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 19 February 1952. Mackaness papers

²⁵ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 18 April 1952. Mackaness papers

real workhorse in Tasmanian history...for the last twenty-five years, almost all the reference books dealing with Tasmanian and Australian history and the history of the neighbouring colonies, you had to turn to the Walker collection for it, and it's still very largely drawn on.²⁶

An early—perhaps the first—suggestion of Crowther's intention came in a letter to Mackaness in May 1953:

...I spend some of my time making a collection of duplicates, and personal volumes (no Australian) for my own declining years as I hope within a reasonable period to see my collection housed & catalogued – not that there is anywhere at the moment for the Government to house it. Above all I want to see it properly housed and catalogued & available for use in my lifetime. I cannot bear the thought of a careless dispersal & sale of so much that has been my “comes viae vitaeque” as Sir William Osler termed his copy of *Religio Medici*...²⁷

He mentioned the gift to Mackaness several times in the next year or two, but not to friends or officials in Tasmania. It was not until 4 November 1955 that the Sir John Morris, Chief Justice and Chairman of the Tasmanian Library Board, informed the State Librarian that Crowther proposed to donate his collection, as well as bookcases and other furniture, to the State Library and that he expected it to be housed in a separate room in the proposed new State Library building.

The Library was at that time housed in grossly inadequate premises on the corner of Argyle and Davey Streets, constructed in the period 1902-07 with the assistance of a grant from Andrew Carnegie. Heather Gaunt has already mentioned the impact of William Walker's substantial donations on the Library's accommodation and services in the 1920s and '30s. The site for a new building was chosen in 1944 and preliminary plans drawn up by December 1949. But an enquiry by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, which began in October 1950, stalled and was not re-opened and concluded for another six years. Revised working drawings were prepared by March 1958, but the site and the necessary loan funds were not finally secured until 1959. In the early 1950s the Tasmanian Library Board had also taken on responsibility for the Archives Branch, which was then housed under the Supreme Court building in Macquarie Street.

Crowther was in a position to exercise some political influence and to call on Tasmanian (and specifically southern Tasmanian) loyalties. In May 1956 the Acting State Librarian reported that Dr Crowther

...has spoken to Sir John and the Premier, emphasising the need for speed in getting adequate accommodation in the new building, since he feels he has not too many years left, and if he cannot receive any guarantees that the collection will be housed adequately upon his death, he feels that the collection should go to a library where it would be housed immediately on his death, for example Launceston or the Mitchell Library.²⁸

It was not only his own health that concerned Crowther. In July 1956 he reported to Mackaness that

The State Library are cataloguing my holdings and it looks as if the process will be a long one, at the rate they are going. Sir John Morris (our CJ and L Governor) was also Chairman of the Library Board. He died suddenly last week at 55 & the loss is one I feel deeply. I have been weeks arranging about my legacy to the State & feel

²⁶ “My Collections”, recording 2, 15:00

²⁷ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 1 May 1953. Mackaness papers

²⁸ AE Browning, file note, 4 May 1956, File 1(L)3. SLT 1/54, Archives Office of Tasmania.

relieved that if I die in a month things should be in order. I don't intend to do so, George mon ami, if I can avoid it! But we live by my age by grace only...²⁹

(I should note that at this time Crowther was sixty-nine, and that he lived for another twenty-five years.)

The Mitchell Library—its origins, collections, policies and procedures—was a constant guide and inspiration for Crowther and for the Tasmanian Library Board (as it was for Crowther's old collecting foe Henry Allport). In early 1956 TD Mutch, a long-serving Trustee of the Public Library of New South Wales and of its Mitchell Committee, had visited Crowther, following which Crowther received a copy of David Scott Mitchell's will as well as documents such as the Mitchell's application form for a reader's ticket. As arrangements for the transfer of the collection gathered pace in the early 1960s, both Crowther and the State Librarian wrote to the State Library of New South Wales seeking advice on conditions of deposit, the marking of rare books, the design of book-plates the development of by-laws and regulations and the design of reader's tickets.

The State Library of Tasmania had provided a staff member to catalogue the collection at Crowther's home almost as soon as the proposed gift was announced, but the process was frustratingly slow. He reported to Mackaness that "...The cataloguing of my own collection goes on very slowly. I had no idea it was so time consuming. My idea was a good check list – but the Dewey system of cataloguing is very exacting...".³⁰ But there was play as well as work. The State Librarian, Bernard Wray, wrote to the architect when planning a visit to Crowther's home to count and measure the framed prints which were to be accommodated, "If you are agreeable we can make a joint visit as previously and I can drink gin whilst you take the measurements".³¹

By the time the new Library building was officially opened in September 1962, there was neither a formal agreement between the Board and Crowther nor any books in the Crowther Room. Crowther had asked that, at the opening, it would simply be stated that "the room is for the use of the Crowther Collection to be handed over in due course."³²

But a year later the major part of the collection was installed in the Crowther Room and plans were under way for Crowther's moment of glory, the official handing-over on 8 April 1964. Two months later he was created a Knight Bachelor in the Queen's Birthday honours list. (And, without overemphasising the alcoholic theme, I should note that the State Librarian, Bernard Wray, wrote to Crowther the day after the handing over:

...A good deal of gin and tonic has flown under the bridge since I first discussed this matter in your sun-room and it was a very happy day for me yesterday to feel that we had achieved so much together.³³)

On the day of the handing-over the Tasmanian Library Board met and resolved that

...having considered the circumstances under which the Crowther Collection has been deposited with the State Library[,] records its view that there is a moral obligation on the part of the Board to recognise that Dr Crowther had handed his principal asset over to the State. Should Dr Crowther's financial circumstances ever make it necessary to do so the Board recognises that it would be its duty to approach

²⁹ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 7 July 1956. Mackaness papers

³⁰ WELH Crowther to George Mackaness, 5 February 1957. NLA Mackaness papers

³¹ Bernard Wray to Frank Harris, 10 February 1961. File 1(L)3. SLT 1/54, Archives Office of Tasmania.

³² TLB, minutes of meeting of 18 August 1962. SLT 71/7, Archives Office of Tasmania

³³ Bernard Wray to WELH Crowther, 9 April 1964. Crowther correspondence files, State Library of Tasmania

the Government of the day to make some provision on his behalf in some way to alleviate the capital loss he has suffered by his gift to the State.³⁴

This resolution was explicitly modelled on the arrangement between EA Petherick and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library in 1911. After some dawdling on the part of the Board, Crowther was accordingly appointed as Honorary Advisor on Australian Bibliography to the State Library at an honorarium of £500 per year from 1 January 1966. But the Board's action had been hastened by an event which deeply disturbed Crowther.

In May 1965 his old foe Henry Allport died and it became known that he had bequeathed his collection to the Tasmanian Government on condition that it be preserved "as a permanent Public Reference Library of Australiana and Museum of Fine Arts as nearly as may be on the lines of the Mitchell Library in Sydney but with a small Fine Arts Museum attached thereto".³⁵ He wanted its management to be vested in the Tasmanian Library Board, but the collection was to remain in his own home in suburban Sandy Bay.

The Allport collection originated with Henry Allport's father Cecil (who had greatly encouraged Crowther to begin collecting) and his uncle Morton Allport. It might have been inherited and developed by Henry's elder brother, another Morton, who was Crowther's dearest friend. But Morton died in the First World War; and, as Sir William recalled:

...as it was eventually Mr Henry Allport, with whom I - relations had never been really cordial, came into the collection and he was my greatest rival, and he was in the happy position of having a wonderful start from his uncle and his father and having reputedly unlimited money to spend. And so I found that he was my principal enemy. And I thought that when he died that was the end of it but I find we're still rivals in the Library here.³⁶

On learning of the bequest, Sir William immediately sought confirmation from the Board regarding his honorary appointment and asked for reassurance that the importance of his own collection to the State Library had not been diminished by the Allport Bequest. He was assured by the Chairman that

The Crowther Collection in conjunction with our own Tasmanian Collection could so far as be foreseen remain as the working research collections of the Library. Their place in this respect could not be taken by the Allport Collection, which was better suited to be regarded as the nucleus of a fine books library, which, because of its size and location, was ill suited to research purposes.³⁷

By May 1966 the Board had approved the creation of a "Librarian of Special Collections", whose duties were firstly to deal with the Allport Bequest and secondly "to maintain the Sir William Crowther Library, the William Walker Bequest Collection and the Tasmanian Collection of the State Library".³⁸ But the appointee was to be based at the Allport home in suburban Sandy Bay, not in the State Library.

Diverted by the demands of the Allport Bequest, the Board did not conclude a formal agreement with Sir William until 15 August 1969, nearly thirteen years after the transfer was first mooted and five years after the handing-over. The deed of agreement made it clear that the collection came as an outright gift and called for the establishment of an endowment fund—which, to Crowther's regret, ultimately proved impossible. The deed included some

³⁴ Tasmanian Library Board minutes, 8 April 1964 amended on 15 May 1964. SLT 71/8, Archives Office of Tasmania.

³⁵ Henry Allport, last will and testament, 14 February 1949. File CEN_8479/1, State Library of Tasmania.

³⁶ "My Collections", recording 1, 14:24

³⁷ Tasmanian Library Board minutes, 19 November 1965. SL 71/8, AOT.

³⁸ TLB meeting papers 11 May 1966, Archives Office of Tasmania

unusual provisions. The Board was to place the collection “under the immediate supervision of a suitably qualified and experienced librarian with a knowledge of Australiana and its collection and care, and preferably a female”. Any similar bequests of a like or similar nature were, if possible, to be included in the WL Crowther Library rather than in the general collections of the State Library of Tasmania. Everything was to be kept in locked book cases, separate and distinct from any other collections of the State Library. And nothing in the collection could be removed from the State Library’s premises for any reason other than conservation treatment.

The rest of the story can be quickly told. In his honorary appointment Sir William maintained regular hours at the Library, initially completing a survey of whaling logbooks in his own and other collections and writing his book-collecting reminiscences. He had hoped that the State Library would publish both of these; but the whaling survey was eventually published by the Royal Society of Tasmania and the reminiscences remained unpublished (though the proceedings of the 1964 handing-over ceremony were belatedly published in 1967). Sir William and his librarian prepared exhibitions and displays, offered assistance to a wide range of researchers and continued to build the collection. Sir William also annotated many of the items in his collection with undoubtedly useful and interesting notes concerning their provenance; but by this time, unfortunately, his always-difficult doctor’s handwriting had become almost illegible. He maintained regular morning office hours until 1980 when, at the age of ninety-three, he sought the Board’s approval to attend in the afternoons rather than the mornings. He died the following year.

On this occasion, it is appropriate to emphasise the significance of David Scott Mitchell, his bequest and its management by the State Library of New South Wales for the inspiration and guidance they offered to Sir William Crowther. To conclude with the words of the chairman of the Tasmanian Library Board, Mr Justice Crisp, at the handing-over in 1964:

Sydney may have its Mitchell but Tasmania will have its Crowther, and its people—in particular its scholars, present and future—will have in this comprehensive and important collection a perpetual reminder of the scholarship and public spirit of the man who devoted his time and his fortune to its acquisition. We shall be forever in his debt.³⁹

Tony Marshall

³⁹ *Proceedings at the handing over of the Crowther Collection of Australiana by Dr WELH Crowther 8 April 1964* (Hobart, State Library of Tasmania, 1967), p.[3].