

Making room for an icon

Looking for a recipe for Pineapple Crunch? Or a knitting pattern for a jumper just like Grandma made? Since its digitisation in 2011, that staple of domestic Aussie life — *The Australian Women's Weekly* — has been helping a diverse range of researchers. *Inside History* talks to those behind this historically significant project

SINCE 1994, the National Library of Australia has financially supported the preservation of nationally significant material through the use of its Community Heritage Grant program. However, it was not until 2009 that the Library initiated its first large-scale project — to digitise the entire

available collection of the first 50 years of *The Australian Women's Weekly* (AWW).



One of the nation's most iconic references to Australian popular culture, the AWW was first published in June 1933, reaching an unprecedented market penetration of 5 per cent by 1936 and was read by one in four of Australian homes by the 1960s. Influential not just because of its articles of interest to women such as fashion and cookery, the AWW covered a wide range of current affairs topics such as the treatment of Aboriginals, the rise of Nazism and WWII, as well as providing commentary on Australian and world affairs throughout the 20th century.

DatacomIT is the company behind the digitisation project. And the above criteria is among the many reasons the AWW was chosen for digitisation, says Eamonn Donohoe, business development manager at DatacomIT. The AWW digitisation project is one of the highest profile, and most interesting projects that the company has been involved in after more than three decades in the industry.

From the day the decision was made by the NLA and its connections to digitise the AWW, the process lasted 18 months, including project planning, digitisation, and making the information available to the public.

Funding for the project was allocated by the Library's Corporate Management Group, which covered staffing, scanning, OCR and quality assurance activities, and the purchase of additional storage needed for the digital files.

The AWW digitisation project is just one of many that DatacomIT has undertaken

via a long-standing relationship with the NLA. Other past projects for the NLA included digitising newspapers, books and journals.

According to Cathy Pilgrim, director of digitisation and photography at the National Library, the decision to digitise using the original editions rather than from the Library's collection of microfiche was easy, as it meant that the project could be captured in colour instead of mono. While the Library held a significant amount of hard copies, it was found that the collection belonging to the State Library of New South Wales was larger and in better condition. Copies and replacements for damaged pages or editions were sourced from the Library's collection as well as that of the Australian War Memorial. Further missing copies were purchased from eBay by DatacomIT or donated by the public following a successful appeal.

The project required a significant amount of

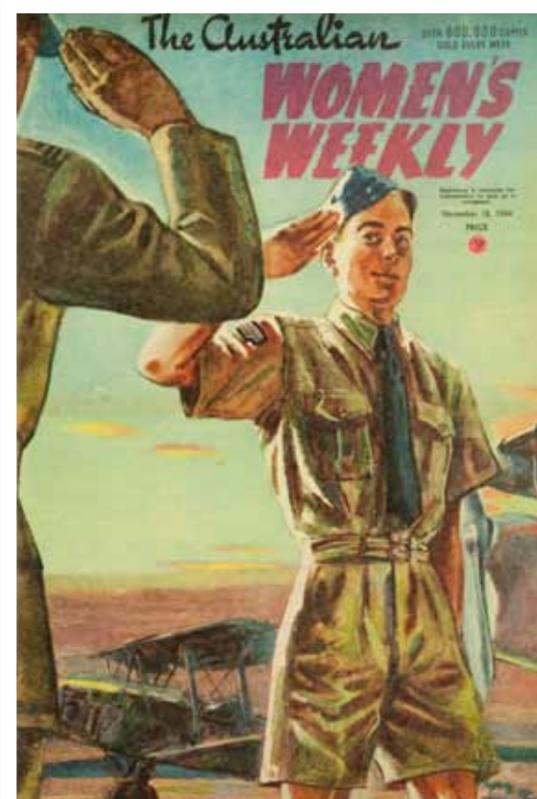
co-operation between three cities. Hard copies of the AWW were couriered from the State Library of New South Wales to the National Library of Australia in Canberra, where a dedicated DatacomIT team worked to digitise the collection of 2,569 issues containing 231,780 pages.

DatacomIT deployed specialist scanning equipment directly to the Library in order to scan the large format publications in the collection. One of the issues the company faced was being able to scan fragile editions without causing further deterioration, says operations manager, Lam Truong. "If we opened fragile items at less than 120 degrees, there was a significant risk that book bindings could break," Lam says. Therefore, one of DatacomIT's customised book scanners was relocated from Melbourne to digitise these more fragile issues with care, speed and accuracy. In addition, the varying size formats, differing qualities of paper and capturing non-conforming items such as patterns and recipes inserts made colour balancing, sizing and overall consistency for each issue a challenge; the final image needed to be as close to the original as possible.

Post processing took place at DatacomIT's head office in Melbourne. Each digitised page was de-skewed, cropped, OCR processed, had metadata applied in accordance with Library requirements that would enable Trove users to access, search, tag and correct text. Each page was then converted to a high resolution TIFF file.

These files were then ingested into Trove. Since then, the AWW has become popular among a diverse cross section of readers. These include academics and researchers, those tracing family history, teaching women's history at university level, background research for novel writing and filmmaking as well as specialist groups such as knitters. This ability to attract such a varied audience demonstrates the contribution to society that the AWW has made over the past 80 years, and has proved a worthwhile and most valued social investment for the National Library of Australia and the Australian public. ♡

* Search *The Australian Women's Weekly* on Trove at www.trove.nla.gov.au/aww



Images Courtesy DatacomIT and National Library of Australia