Building a better horse and buggy: the privileging of access in reading rooms over online access

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Archives reading rooms were once the only reasonable way of providing free, equitable access to records. An alternative is now available. Online access to digitised records makes access available to far more people and is more equitable and more efficient than access in reading rooms. Despite this archives continue to privilege reading room access over online access. They would better meet their access responsibilities by transferring resources from maintaining reading rooms to improved, expanded and free online access even if this means closing reading rooms or charging for access to them.

> … in a democratic, information-based society, there exists a basic social right to equitable and free access to archival services. Archives in turn must restructure their services to respond to this right.[1]

> Henry Ford pointed out that if he had listened to his customers he would have built a better horse and buggy.[2]

As government archives were established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries they provided access to their collections in the only way then reasonably possible. They provided facilities in their

buildings in which researchers could consult the records held there. This echoed the situation in libraries and museums where until well into the second half of the twentieth century the only effective way of giving access to publicly owned collections was by the provision of physical access in physical buildings. It was the way that users of archives, like users of libraries, assumed and expected that access would be given. It also resulted in application to archives of nineteenth-century views of free access to information as a public good and part of the broader educational and civilising responsibility of the state that had led to the first free library movements, the foundation of museums of natural history and compulsory public education.[3]

Archives in Canada, Ian Wilson notes, 'came into being in response to the expressed needs of historical research.'[4] The same is true of Australia[5] and the United States of America[6] while in England the needs of historians soon replaced those of lawyers which were the main impetus behind the establishment of the Public Record Office.[7] Meeting the needs of historical researchers was the critical requirement for archives in providing access to their holdings. Those needs were best met in the high age of empirical research by the provision of quiet, private, reading rooms in which records would be provided as required for consultation, and information and support given by archivists knowledgeable not only in methods of arrangement and description but quite often also in content and subject matter.

Like libraries, archives supplemented the provision of access through reading rooms with services responding to requests for information by letter or telephone. Responses to these sorts of requests by archives have been primarily in the form of the free provision of general subject or topical guides, or lists of records which might contain records of interest to the enquirer who would then be expected to come to the reading room in person or through the proxy of a search agent to consult the records.[8]

In recent decades there has been an expansion in the number of users and a democratisation of access to archives. The professional historical and legal researchers who were originally almost the only public users of archives were gradually joined by other groups, notably genealogists, but also including heritage workers and activists, independent

historians, artists, writers, students, hobbyists and journalists.[9] Over the same period technological advance has provided archives with the means to improve and augment the services provided to their users. The development of photocopying enabled researchers to replace notes on index cards with copies of documents or relevant parts of them. It enabled archives to provide copies of whole documents to people who were unable to attend reading rooms but who could write in asking for a copy. Archives generally charged users for the provision of photocopies, and with good reason. While access to documents in reading rooms was available to all who could come in, the provision of a copy was a private benefit. In more recent years the availability of scanners, digital cameras, laptop computers and portable storage media has greatly enhanced researchers' ability to obtain for themselves copies of records that they consult in reading rooms. Typically, archives do not charge for allowing researchers to capture records in this way. While still clearly a private benefit to researchers, digital images of records taken by the researcher in the reading room do not increase the cost to the archives of providing access to the record. When digital images of records are made by the archives and supplied by email in response to a request from a remote user, charges similar to those applying to photocopies are levied.[10]

The advent of the new media has also allowed archives to initiate a significant number of new services. Catalogues or databases of holdings were published to the Web, enabling users to locate records of interest to them before coming to reading rooms.[11] In particular, the availability of digital imaging and the development of institutional web presences enabled copies of records or parts of records to be made directly available to users and potential users through the World Wide Web. Often these were made available initially as illustrations of particular 'treasures' or examples of types of records held, or as part of mediated and edited collections of records related to a theme directed at particular user groups such as students or family historians.[12] Gradually however many archives began to digitise whole record items and groups of records, even whole series, particularly series that received a high level of user demand, so that it became possible for users to obtain on the Internet exact images of what they would have consulted had they travelled to a reading room to see them.[13]

This soon became the most popular way for users to obtain access to records. In the United Kingdom the National Archives (TNA) provides 221 documents online for every document provided in reading rooms.[14] In the last available National Archives of Australia (NAA) *Annual Report,* that for 2008–2009, it is reported that there were 22,290 visits to reading rooms for the year but 5,249,213 visits to the NAA's online RecordSearch database, which is the method of accessing digitised images of records.[15] The trend over a number of years is clear. Visits to RecordSearch have increased as access to digital images of records have increased and at a far greater rate and to far greater levels than can be explained by the stable numbers of people using RecordSearch to identify, locate and order records for use in reading rooms.[16] These figures are reinforced by the findings of a 2005 NAA review of reference services which found that 70% of reference use was made up of visits to RecordSearch.[17]

Yet archives do not appear to have addressed the theoretical implications of the new situation.

Home location, financial means, place and conditions of employment, family responsibilities, disability and transport arrangements, all impinge on the practical ability of people to attend reading rooms. There is no real means of access for a person who lacks the good fortune to live in reasonable commuting distance from a reading room (someone who lives in Kalgoorlie, say, or Alice Springs or Whyalla or Mt Isa) even if the office in their state capital holds records of interest to them. There is even less practical access available to someone who even if living close to a reading room needs to consult records held across the country (someone in Brisbane say who wants to consult the records of the CSIRO Division of Oceanography which are held in Hobart). Digitised records available online are however accessible to all, irrespective of location, and at a time to suit individual convenience and preference rather than reading room hours of opening.

Despite the fact that much greater numbers use the Internet to access records than use reading rooms, the amount spent on providing reading room access is significantly greater than that spent on providing online access. The 2005 NAA reference review included an attribution of the percentage of funds spent on reference services to the various facets

of that service. It found that the amount spent on providing online access was one fifth of the amount spent on providing and maintaining reading rooms.[18]

Providing access to records online is significantly cheaper than providing access in reading rooms. In 2003–2004 the average cost of providing a single item in the NAA's reading rooms was twelve and a half times that of providing it online. In Canberra, the location in which it was cheapest to provide reading room access, it cost seven and a half times as much to provide access to a physical item, while in Hobart, the most expensive reading room, the cost of provision of an item in the reading room was 65 times that of providing it online.[19]

Users of reading rooms are not charged for the service provided to them. The NAA charges those who request online access to a record that has not yet been imaged $16.50 for a standard file and more for larger records. The NAA refuses to make some records available at all online.[20] In the UK, TNA charges £3.50 for the download of most documents.[21]

The availability of Internet access to digital copies of the records that previously could only be made available in reading rooms has however turned the old public good argument on its head. Digital copying of records and widespread Internet availability are able to provide access to all who want it, or nearly all who want it, in a place and at a time that is convenient for them, and at a lower delivery cost to the archives than alternatives. Internet access to digital copies now provides the public good. The higher cost and less available alternative of individual access in reading rooms should now be seen as essentially a private benefit and, for those who want it, a value-added service. Yet, instead of meeting their responsibility to provide 'equitable and free access to archival services'[22] in this new environment, archives continue to maintain reading rooms as the privileged means of interfacing with users. They charge for the service which is both cheaper to provide and meets the needs of far more users, while providing for free for much fewer people the private benefit.

This is not to suggest that archives necessarily see the situation in these terms. The weight of tradition is hard to overcome. Established access regimes reflect the way things have always been done.[23] What was introduced out of practical necessity (the only reasonable way

of providing access) came to be seen as a position of principle ('basic access' in reading rooms as a citizen's right) and the key way of fulfilling institutional charters to provide access to their holdings.[24] The purpose of archives in relation to access to their holdings is not however to provide free access in reading rooms. It should be to provide access in the most equitable and effective way possible. Clearly at one time reading rooms provided the best way of doing this. They no longer do so and it is inconceivable that any government business process created today would envisage privileging physical access over online access. Indeed, since the publication of the Commonwealth's *Government Online* in 2000[25] and especially since the policy expressed in its *Australia's Digital Economy: Future Directions* of 2009,[26] it could be argued that any privileging should be in the other direction.

The NAA perhaps recognised this in 2001 when it provided an alternative way of accessing archives by allowing anyone to request the digitisation of records which would then be made available through RecordSearch, the NAA's online database.[27] The service was designed specifically as an alternative to accessing records in reading rooms and was therefore free.[28] It was very popular with users, and with nearly 30,000 requests for items to be digitised in its first full year of operation its very popularity started to cause demand problems for the NAA.[29] Rather than move resources from other forms of access provision to support the new service however, there was an alternative and traditional interpretation available. Despite the fact that the publication of images of records to the Web made those records thenceforth available to anyone, anywhere, at a cost of practically zero, the NAA preferred to see requests for digitisation of records as if they were the same as requests for a photocopy and thus a personal benefit for the requester, and it introduced charges for digitising records in 2005.[30]

TNA in London too has let the traditional way of doing things inhibit it from providing equitable access to online users. TNA allows free access to all digitised records in its reading rooms while generally charging for access to them otherwise. It has done so deliberately to encourage researchers 'to continue to visit TNA's reading rooms, even if the records which interested them were accessible remotely via the internet'.[31] It still sees its reading rooms as providing the public good and argues

that by providing access to digitised records there it maintains 'its role of providing free access to the public records'[32] and that the provision of access to digital copies is a 'value-added' service.[33]

It is not just tradition however that leads archives to continue to allocate resources disproportionately in favour of reading rooms.

Another reason is the view perhaps most neatly expressed by Terry Cook, that the proper role of archives is not just to provide access to documents but to lead users to the deeper knowledge found in the contextual relationships inherent in archives.[34] Those who try to access copies of records online access only the document. Lacking contact with experienced and expert reference archivists they cannot be helped to acquire this deeper knowledge and perforce receive an inferior, generally context-free, almost un-archival service.

As Evans and Wurster demonstrated, 'to the extent that information is embedded in physical modes of delivery, its economics are governed by a basic law: the trade-off between richness and reach'.[35] Archives' traditional method of providing access through reading rooms provides richness in information delivery. Archivists have argued for the importance of this even if it is not in accord with the expressed needs of their users.[36]

The unavoidable cost is reach. The personal benefits obtained by some users from this model are at the expense of most other users, including most current users of reading rooms. A 2001 NAA user study found that 70% of reading room users sought a single piece of information usually relating to a named person or place.[37] They did not need the rich, context-laden reading room experience. Almost certainly, had the information that they sought been available online that would have satisfied their needs as adequately as they were satisfied by attending the reading room. There is no way of knowing how many others who might also have wanted a similar single piece of information were unable to visit reading rooms but could have accessed the information that they wanted online.

When in early November 2009 the NAA announced that in order to make the budgetary savings demanded of all Commonwealth agencies by the Australian Government it would close its state offices and their reading

rooms in Adelaide, Hobart and Darwin,[38] there was significant public opposition[39] that led eventually to the reversing of the decision.[40]

Those opposing the closure of reading rooms did not use tradition as an argument, although it clearly informed their position. Nor did they explicitly argue that they favoured a rich archival reference service over a wide-reaching one. However they did advance a number of reasons for their position. Although the purpose of many of these reasons was not to address the issue of how access to archives is best provided,[41] some arguments raised during the anti-closure campaign can be seen as arguments for the retention of the access status quo and implicitly against any diversion of resources from the maintenance of reading rooms into digitisation and online access. These arguments include:

- digitisation cannot replace reading room access because only a small part of the collection is digitised;[42]

- relying on digitised access would prevent new areas of research;[43]

- not everyone has Internet access;[44]

- people in smaller states would have less access than people in larger states;[45]

- Aboriginal people would be particularly disadvantaged;[46] and,

- some people, particularly historians, must have access to original materials.[47]

It is true that only a small part of the collection is digitised but only a small part of the collection is ever accessed in reading rooms,[48] and it is cheaper to digitise every item requested than to provide them in reading rooms. If fewer resources are applied to maintaining reading rooms, more resources could be available for imaging more records.

If the whole of every record item accessed in the reading rooms in Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Darwin and Hobart in 2003–2004 had instead been digitised it would have cost less than 11% of the cost of maintaining those reading rooms for the year. Not one user of those reading rooms would have obtained access to any less material than they actually did obtain and there would have been a significant sum, well over half a million dollars in 2004, that could have been applied towards further digitisation, the development of finding aids or the provision of specific

assistance for classes of people in need of it.[49] To have digitised all of every record accessed in that year in all NAA reading rooms would have required only about one quarter of the cost of maintaining those reading rooms.[50] Every one of the records accessed in those offices in that year would have from then on been available to any user anywhere in the world at any time at no further cost to the NAA.

In the view of the History Council of Western Australia reading rooms need to be retained as they currently are because

> [online access] neither encompasses (nor gives thought to) the need for ongoing historical research in areas not yet identified as 'popular' . . . quite apart from new fields of enquiry by researchers not yet identified. It neither addresses the current lack of adequate identification of records that exist (coupled with lack of sufficient contextual explanation in the online catalogues) nor the self evident flaw – that those outside the NAA are not necessarily even aware of the records that are held by the NAA.[51]

While this argument may sound plausible in the polemic of a campaign, it too sees as the solution what is actually the problem. It is the requirement to use the majority of resources in running reading rooms that is one of the reasons why resources are not available to identify, describe and contextualise records. There is nothing magical about reading rooms that enables researchers to identify records there that were previously unknown to them. They identify records by using finding aids, indexing tools and control records or by receiving advice from reference archivists. Releasing sufficient resources from funding reading rooms would enable more finding aids to be created and made available online. Insofar as it is personal access to reference officers that the History Council is arguing to retain, the provision of a superior one-to-one service to the relatively few who can easily attend the Perth office is patently inequitable when the vast majority of users lack much more basic services.

A common reason given for the need to retain reading rooms was that not everyone has Internet access and reading rooms provide these people with the only means of access to the archival record. As the

History Council of Western Australia argued, 'There is . . . an arrogant assumption that everyone uses a computer – and a computer with an internet connection to boot!'[52]

In fact, very few Australian users of NAA reading rooms are without Internet access. The NAA user survey found that in 2001 82.5% of reading room users had Internet access.[53] As the proportion of Australians with a household Internet subscription has increased by over 90% in the intervening period,[54] it is reasonable to conclude that almost all users of reading rooms who wish to have Internet access have it. But even if, say, 5% of users of reading rooms do not have convenient or effective access to the Internet, it is not equitable for the needs of those few users to skew the service provided to all others by using the vast majority of the available resources to maintain reading rooms primarily for them.

Almost all public libraries, even many in the remotest parts of Australia,[55] have Internet access available for those who do not have it any other way. Access to public libraries is no more difficult than access to archives reading rooms; for most people a public library will be closer and more convenient to visit than will the nearest archives office.

It is inherently unlikely that those who live in places too remote for Internet access are regular users of capital city reading rooms, but, even if they are, making special arrangements for access for them in other ways will still be more efficient than maintaining reading rooms. Arrangements would also need to be made for those who cannot access the Internet because of physical impairment or age but this is no different from the need to make specific access arrangements for all people with disabilities or other special needs.

An argument that resonated in the states where closures of reading rooms were planned was that people living in smaller jurisdictions would have inferior access compared with those in larger ones. The closure of reading rooms in smaller states and territories only results in less access for people in those states if reading rooms remain the primary and privileged means of accessing records. If resources are moved to digitisation and online delivery, and emphasis is given to making such access the standard means of obtaining records, then people in smaller jurisdictions not only have the same level of access as others, they have much better access than they had under the previous regime. They will

have access to digitised records currently held in other places as well as the records currently made available only in the reading room in their own capital city.

In the campaign against the closure of the Darwin office of the NAA, a particularly persuasive argument was that Indigenous people would be specially disadvantaged. The Darwin office holds significant records of personal and family information vital in enabling members of the Stolen Generations to reconstruct their lives and reconnect with families and communities. These records are accessed in the Darwin reading room because that is the way access is currently given. It is, however, not axiomatic that closure of the current reading room would result in reduced access by Aboriginal people to these records.

It may be after examination that the most effective way of continuing to provide access to the records would be by retaining a dedicated access facility in Darwin. But there are other possibilities. Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory already use digital technologies to access important cultural records that are held elsewhere[56] and to consolidate community cultural and local knowledge in locally controlled databases.[57] Diverting some of the money currently used to maintain the reading room to providing access to records covered by the *Bringing Them Home* project in this way, perhaps augmented by direct support to Link-Up services, could possibly provide a better solution. It should not just be assumed that maintaining the present reading room is the only way of meeting this need.

Northern Territory historian David Carment, in writing to the Minister responsible for the NAA about the proposed closures, noted that historians need access to 'the deep context buried in archives'.[58] This need is often asserted[59] and the Irish historian Michael Kennedy, as an example, has explicitly addressed the issue:

> By placing material online and lauding the online archive to the detriment of the original, we are in danger of diluting the documents, placing them out of context, removing or altering critical physical metadata that help the researcher understand the ethos and zeitgeist of the period in which they are working. Such metadata could be as simple as the feel of the paper . . .[60]

It is beyond the competence of this writer to take issue with Kennedy and other historians on the detail of their research techniques and requirements, although the use of research assistants and the readiness of scholars to accept copies in at least some circumstances indicate that a requirement to handle the original is not necessary in all cases. One cannot help but gain the impression that Kennedy merely *prefers* to work in archives than online, especially when he continues 'I often recall more about the atmosphere of an archive and the sense of place from visits to archives than the detail of what I researched there.'[61]

But even accepting that historians do require access to original materials for their work, their needs and their convenience should not determine the shape of an archival reference service. A proper reference service must be able to cater for the needs of historians, but as with the situation for those without Internet access, or who prefer not to use the Internet, it is inequitable for their needs to dictate the form of access and to limit the extent of access available to others.

There is a subsidiary argument relating to the special needs of historians. It is that the archival research of historians, and other academic researchers, benefits not just themselves but that there is a 'trickle-down' benefit to non-users of archives, to the general community, in the books, articles and films produced as a result of their research.[62] In this way academic users of archives represent in archives not just their own proportionally small numbers but the much greater numbers who consume the products they produce. It is at least arguable that the community should be prepared to pay for this benefit. But there is nothing in this argument to require that the payment should come unequally from other users and would-be users of archives. If the community sees this as a benefit, and if historians cannot produce their works without physical access to records, then other arrangements, including perhaps charging for their privileged access will have to be made. Some would say that universities and research councils are funded to pay for the general community benefit from academic research.

As Wilson points out, it is the responsibility of archives to 'restructure their services to respond to' the right of citizens to 'equitable and free access to archival services'.[63] Archives echo this in the standards that they seek to apply. The Council of Australasian Archives and Records

Authorities' *Statement of Principle – Providing public access to records in Australian government archives*, includes the following:

- Archives should seek to serve all of their communities with a range of services appropriate to the stated or implied needs of those communities.

- Where possible users should have choice in the means of access.

- A user's location and ability to access a Reading Room should not be a barrier to access to both records and staff expertise.

- Users should not face any greater barriers to access within the control of the archives because of their … location or economic status.[64]

These principles are not fulfilled for those who, because of location, economic status, choice, or other reasons, can only effectively access records online. The restructuring now required is the transfer of resources from providing and maintaining reading rooms to providing free access to digitised records. A disinterested analysis of how this transfer of resources can occur can only conclude that closing at least some reading rooms and/or charging for most reading room access is required.

Even if significant resources are transferred from reading rooms to digitisation, a greatly expanded and improved provision of online access will not meet all user needs. Archives do address, and are required to address, a range of special needs. In particular in Australia archives make arrangements for people with disabilities and for people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

In an access model based on online access, some of the people who currently require special services, the mobility-impaired for example, would now have their needs satisfactorily met by the mainstream service. There would however be new groups of users for whom special arrangements would need to be made which may include continued access in physical facilities to original records. These potentially include Indigenous Australians with special needs for access to records that may establish family and community links, those who do not have computers or effective Internet access, and those who argue that only physical access to original records will allow them to obtain the context-enriched information that is vital for their archival research.

It is also probable that some types of records will continue to be more appropriately accessed in original formats, and arrangements to provide for this would also have to be made.

The need for the transfer of resources does not therefore mean that all resources currently applied to maintaining reading rooms should be now applied to digitisation programs and online access, or that all reading rooms should be closed immediately. What is inescapable in this model however is that some archives users, those who are currently regular and continuing patrons of reading rooms, will receive a lesser quality service than they currently receive, or they will have to pay to maintain the higher level of service. When, within any level of resource, service levels are raised for the majority who previously suffered worse service than some, the superior service currently given to the privileged minority will decline. Without an increase in resources, an increase in archival reach will diminish some of the richness of that service for that minority. This has already happened to some extent because of the growth in the use of archives and the wider range of users who now seek to access the services they provide. The 'silver service' formerly received by eminent scholars and other popular researchers has gradually disappeared.[65] In a publicly-funded service in a society in which equity of access is a reasonable expectation for all, that is a trade-off that should be supported.

Archives today will serve more users more efficiently at a lower cost and, above all, most equitably, by making access to archives through the provision of digitised copies available through the Internet the primary means of fulfilling their basic social responsibility.

Endnotes

[1]   Ian E Wilson, 'Towards a Vision of Archival Services', *Archivaria*, no. 31, Winter 1990–91, p. 92.

[2]   'Schumpeter', 'The three habits of highly irritating management gurus', *The Economist*, 22 October 2009.

[3]   See for example [Redmond Barry], 'Address on the Opening of the Free Public Library of Ballarat East by Sir Redmond Barry on Friday, 1st January, 1869', *La Trobe Library Journal*, vol. 7, no. 26, December 1980, pp. 42–8.

[4]   Wilson, p. 93.

[5]   Alan Ventress, 'State Archives in New South Wales 1788–1960: a tale of tension and neglect', *Australian Library Journal,* vol. 56, nos 3 & 4, November 2007, pp. 435–6.

[6]   Donald R McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents 1934–1968,* University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1978, pp. 5–6.

[7]   John D Cantwell, *The Public Record Office 1838–1958,* HMSO, London, 1991, pp. 5, 34–6, 139–41.

[8]   See for example the NAA's *General reference inquiry form* available on its website at <http://www.naa.gov.au/info/forms/ref-inquiry.aspx>, accessed 14 October 2010; see also NAA Fact Sheet 51, *Copying Charges,* and Fact Sheets 40–45, *Research agents,* which can be accessed via a numerical listing on the NAA website, available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/by-number/index.aspx>, accessed 14 October 2010.

[9]   Wilson, p. 93; M Kenna, *User Study – Reading Rooms: report on users needs and behaviours,* unpublished National Archives of Australia report, October 2001, p. 51 [Note: access to this report and other unpublished National Archives of Australia reports cited below was obtained under the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*]; R Boyns, 'Archivists and Family Historians: local authority record repositories and the family history user group', *Journal of the Society of Archivists,* vol. 20, no. 1, 1999, p. 63.

[10]   See for example NAA Fact Sheet 51, *Copying charges* available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs51.aspx>, accessed 21 September 2010.

[11]   Chris Cooper, 'Online On-Site: Transforming public services in the National Archives', *Journal of the Society of Archivists,* vol. 29, no. 2, October 2008, p. 194; see also, for example, State Records New South Wales, *Archives Investigator* available at <http://investigator.records.nsw.gov.au/>, accessed 1 July 2010.

[12]   See for example the NAA's online resources for schools available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/learning/schools/online/index.aspx>, accessed 1 September 2010, and its Australian Prime Ministers website available at <http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/>, accessed 1 September 2010.

[13]   Cooper, p. 194; P Macpherson, *Digitising records for improved accessibility,* unpublished National Archives of Australia report, November 2000, pp. 19–21.

[14]   The National Archives, *Annual Report and Resource Accounts 2009–2010,* The Stationery Office, London, 2010, p. 17.

[15]   National Archives of Australia, *Annual Report 2008–09,* pp. 35–6. These figures are not completely comparable – those who visited reading rooms would also have made use of RecordSearch as would have many others who did not go on to use or seek imaged records – but the scale of the difference is telling. Although the figure for visits to RecordSearch is a decline on the number in the previous year and the number of visits to reading rooms a slight increase, the trend over a number of years is clear.

[16]   ibid.

[17]   [P Macpherson], *National Archives of Australia, Review of Reference Services,* unpublished National Archives of Australia report, 2005, pp. 18–19. The same study found that published figures for visits to reading rooms significantly overstated the numbers of people who visited reading rooms to consult records, perhaps by as much as 50% indicating that user preference for online access was even greater.

[18]   ibid., p. 60. Note that this cost attribution included and compared direct salary costs and on-costs and direct administration costs, and also proportional property operating expenses, corporate, governance and other management costs.

[19] ibid.

[20] National Archives of Australia, 'Online access to records on request', available at <*http://www.naa.gov.au/services/digitisation-copying/digitisation.aspx*>, accessed 8 June 2010.

[21] The National Archives, 'Documents Online: Help Section', available at <*http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/help/help-payment.asp*>, accessed 18 September 2010.

[22] Wilson, p. 92.

[23] Australian archives legislation provided that entry to reading rooms and access to records in them was to be universally free. Other forms of access, by the provision of copies or, in the Commonwealth Act, by the use of computers, attracted a charge to users. In the UK access to online records is free in reading rooms (Cooper, p. 194).

[24] Senate Environment, Recreation, Communication and the Arts References Committee, *Access to Heritage: user charges in museums, art galleries and national parks*, Canberra, 1998, pp. 99–100.

[25] National Office for the Information Economy, *Government Online – The Commonwealth Government's Online Strategy*, Canberra, 2000.

[26] Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, *Australia's Digital Economy: Future Directions*, Canberra, 2009, available at <*http://www.dbcde.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/117681/DIGITAL_ECONOMY_FUTURE_DIRECTIONS_FINAL_REPORT.pdf*>, accessed 8 June 2010, pp. 12–14.

[27] Ted Ling and Anne McLean, 'Taking it to the people: why the National Archives of Australia embraced digitisation on demand', *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, vol. 35, no. 1, March 2004, available at <*http://alia.org.au/publishing/aarl/35.1/full.text/ling.mclean.html*>, accessed 4 September 2010; P Macpherson, *Digitising records for improved accessibility*, unpublished National Archives of Australia report, November 2000.

[28] Ted Ling and Derina McLaughlin, *Digitisation on Demand – Where to now?: a review of the digitisation service*, unpublished National Archives of Australia report, August 2003, pp. 5–6.

[29] *National Archives of Australia, Review of Reference Services*, p. 57; Ling and McLaughlin, p. 7.

[30] Ling and McLaughlin, pp. 5–6.

[31] Cooper, pp. 194–5.

[32] ibid., p. 194.

[33] The National Archives, 'Documents Online: Help Section'.

[34] Terry Cook, 'Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming', *Archivaria*, no. 31, Winter 1990–91, pp. 130–31.

[35] P Evans and T Wurster, 'Strategy and the new economics of information', *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 1997, p. 73.

[36] Cook, pp. 128–31.

[37] Kenna, p. 4.

[38] National Archives of Australia, 'From the Director-General', 13 November 2009, available at <*http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/director-general/index.aspx*>, accessed 17 November 2009.

[39] There were over 60 emails on the Australian Society of Archivists' email list on the topic between 12 and 17 November all opposing the proposed closures and urging action to have the decision reversed (see *<http://lists.archivists.org.au/mailman/ private/aus-archivists/2009-November/date.html>*, accessed 17 November 2009; see also 'Save NAA offices in Adelaide Hobart and Darwin', *Causes,* available at *<http://www. causes.com/causes/ 398833?recruiter_id=16943523>*, accessed 15 April 2010; Petition to The Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives: Closure of National Archives Offices in Adelaide, Darwin and Hobart, available at *<http://aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/petitions/terms/8feb2010/terms279.pdf>*, accessed 4 March 2010; Samela Harris, 'Threat to state home for National Archives', *Advertiser,* 18 November 2009, available at *<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/ threat-to-state-home-for-national-archives/story-e6frea83-1225799046971>*, accessed 1 June 2010; Mike Sexton, 'People power averts closure of National Archives', *7:30 Report,* 23 February 2010, transcript available at *<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2010/ s2828294.htm>*, accessed 25 February 2010: Eleni Roussos, 'NT Govt fights National Archive closure', *ABC News,* 11 December 2009, available at *<http://www.abc.net.au/ news/stories/2009/12/11/2768867.htm>*, accessed 30 June 2010.

[40] Senator J Ludwig, Media Releases, 23 February 2010: 'Rudd Government listens to Darwin on National Archives', 'Rudd Government listens to Hobart on National Archives', 'Rudd Government listens to Adelaide on National Archives', available from *<http://www.smos.gov.au/media/2010/index.html>*, accessed 25 February 2010.

[41] People opposed the closures, among other reasons, because of unspecified 'disadvantages that will be faced by researchers, organisations and the general public', *(Journals of the Senate,* p. 2738); because the process of announcing the closures was done without adequate consultation, (ibid.); because they wished to defend the jobs of archivists, (Australian Society of Archivists, 'Position Statement on National Archives of Australia threatened closures', available at *<http://archivists. ivt.com.au/sitebuilder/advocacy/knowledge/asset/files/8/asapositionstatementnaav01_201 00304.pdf>*, accessed 6 March 2010); because of a view that only by maintaining a local presence could the NAA provide adequate current recordkeeping support to government agencies, (Australian Society of Archivists, Position Statement); because it would be unfair for smaller states to have lesser facilities than larger states, (Nicolas Rothwell, 'Budget cuts put recorded history of the nation under siege', *Australian,* 20 February 2010, available at *<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/budget-cuts-put-recorded-history-of-the-nation-under-siege/story-e6frg6nf-1225832363511>*, accessed 1 March 2010); because many records held in state offices are of special heritage significance to that locality, (Alexander Downer, 'Keep SA's history here', *Advertiser,* 25 January 2010, p. 23); and because the savings to be gained from the closure were seen as illusory, (Rothwell).

[42] History Council of Western Australia, *Newsletter,* vol. 6, no. 1, Summer 2010, pp. 8–9.

[43] Downer.

[44] Rothwell.

[45] Downer.

[46] Rothwell.

[47] ibid.

[48] For example, significantly less than half of one percent of the NAA collection is accessed by public users in any year. See P Macpherson, 'Theory, standards and implicit

assumptions: public access to post-current government records', *Archives & Manuscripts*, vol. 30, no. 1, May 2002, p. 17.

[49] Extrapolated from information in *National Archives of Australia, Review of Reference Services*, pp. 26 and 60.

[50] Extrapolated from information in *National Archives of Australia, Review of Reference Services*, p. 60.

[51] History Council of Western Australia, pp. 8–9.

[52] ibid.

[53] M Kenna, p. 25.

[54] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *8153.0 – Internet Activity, Australia, Jun 2001*, Table 2.2; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *8153.0 – Internet Activity, Australia, Jun 2009*, Table 1.

[55] For example, see details of facilities of individual libraries and knowledge centres listed in Northern Territory Library Service, *Locate your Library*, available at *<http://www.lyl.nt.gov.au/list_of_libraries>*, accessed 3 July 2010.

[56] N Gumbula, A Corn, J Mant, 'Matjabala Mali' Buku-Runanmaram: implications for archives and access in Arnhem Land', *Archival Science*, vol. 9, nos 1–2, June 2009, pp. 7–14, available at *<http://www.springerlink.com/content/u3x0086x4u664802/fulltext.pdf>*, accessed 5 February 2010.

[57] Northern Territory Library Service, *Community Stories*, available at *<http://www.ntl. nt.gov.au/our_story_version_2_project>*, accessed 1 July 2010.

[58] Rothwell.

[59] For example see P Bignell and M Bell, 'Historians furious as Kew archives are "dumbed down"', *The Independent*, 12 July 2009, available at *<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/ home-news/historians-furious-as-kew-archives-are-dumbed-down-1742753.html>*, accessed 10 February 2010; the writer would also like to acknowledge a spirited discussion on this subject in February 2010 with Professor Bill Gammage.

[60] Kennedy.

[61] ibid.

[62] Cook, pp. 132–3.

[63] Wilson, p. 92.

[64] Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities, *Statement of Principle – Providing public access to records in Australian government archives*, March 2007, available at *<http://www.caara.org.au/index.php/policy-statements/statement-of-principle-providing-public-access-to-records-in-australian-government-archives/>*, accessed 9 September 2010.

[65] D Reilly, P de Serville, J Arnold, 'Remembering the La Trobe Library', *La Trobe Journal*, no. 80, Spring 2007, p. 31.