

Editorial

'Does Australia really give a damn about rights?' was the question journalist and author David Marr addressed in his keynote speech at the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's annual Human Rights Oration on 10 December 2010. With the Australian Government's decision not to proceed with a Human Rights Act fresh in his mind, Marr reflected on why so many attempts to enshrine human rights into the Australian constitution have now failed to bear fruit. In Marr's view, the lesson to be drawn from this is that Australians 'contrary to our larrikin myths, are people with deep respect for authority... a tractable, law-abiding people who may loathe politicians, but respect authority. So when it comes to changing the constitution, indeed when it comes to changing any institutions, we only move when we're told.' In Marr's view, the enactment of a human rights bill would only be likely if backed by a consensus of leaders across the political spectrum advocating for such change, rather than through some form of grass-roots agitation. I couldn't help wondering whether this analysis had something to tell us about the unresolved nature of the Heiner Affair.

More than twenty years ago, the records of the Heiner Inquiry into Peter Coyne's management of the John Oxley Youth Detention Centre were destroyed at the behest of the Queensland State Archivist. To this day, the circumstances that led to this irregular disposal of records have never been adequately investigated by a duly constituted authority with the powers to get to the bottom of what was known and by whom. The Heiner Affair, as this scandal has come to be known, has now become a textbook case of how recordkeeping can be undermined by poor decision-making, murky accountability and political pressure aimed at preserving some people from the reach of the rule of law. In late December 2010 I interviewed Kevin Lindeberg, the ex-union official who has doggedly pursued a resolution of the injustices at the heart of the Heiner Affair, and who has been advocating for a remedy to the flaws in our political, legal and archival systems that it has revealed. The transcript of the interview has been published in this issue. Speaking, about the motivations for his twenty-year advocacy campaign, and reflecting on its significance for archivists and recordkeeping in Australia, he remains

convinced that 'ordinary Australians hold dear to the principle of equality before the law because it goes to the heart of our so-called fair-go society: that everyone should be treated equally.' Perhaps the problem is that despite their suspicions about politicians, Australians generally cannot bring themselves to believe that systematic encroachments on the principle of equality before the law have been taking place underneath their very noses.

Despite the lack of resolution, the repercussions of the affair continue to grow, as does awareness of it beyond Australia's shores. In his article 'Ripples across the pond', Randall Jimerson presents the reception of the affair in his native North America, and compares it with other lapses in recordkeeping and accountability that have occurred in the United States, Canada and South Africa. While the Heiner Affair rarely rates a mention in popular debate, the WikiLeaks release of United States embassy cables has become one of the most widely-covered stories relating to recordkeeping in a long time. The emergence of Wikileaks as a player on the world stage according to Alex Byrne 'has introduced a new agency, one which will accept leaked documents anonymously, assess them, possibly redact elements, compile guides and summaries, and publish facsimiles of the documents on a public website for all to see.' The addition of WikiLeaks to the glut of online activities and platforms with recordkeeping implications was recently discussed at a gathering hosted by the Recordkeeping Roundtable in conjunction with the NSW branch of the Australian Society of Archivists, posing the provocative question 'After WikiLeaks, is it all over for the Archives?' As Byrne points out, the developments associated with WikiLeaks and online social media should be keeping all of us, at least metaphorically, awake at night. As archivists, we continue to struggle to stay on top of developments that increasingly impact on archival and recordkeeping work but which are beyond our power to control or affect.

While Byrne sees opportunities for the profession in these developments to embrace openness and new forms of cultural expression, Paul Dalglish in 'The thorniest area' draws our attention to a stubborn contradiction brought to the fore by the proliferation of online modes of access to records. Enabled by new technologies being implemented in most of our major institutions, people want more access to records, and online access has become one of the most effective ways of making this happen, as was argued by Paul Macpherson in 'Building a better horse and buggy' which appeared in the November 2010 issue of this journal. Dalglish observes that while

advocating for the cost-effectiveness of online access, Macpherson avoids concerns relating to the visibility and ease of access to personal information made available online. In response to growing unease about this situation, he observes that archivists are no longer dealing with 'a simple case of disclosure or non-disclosure of personal information; the archivist must now decide what is a reasonable degree of exposure of that information'. Dalgleish considers strategies which archivists can implement to rationally and consistently determine this degree of exposure while working within legislative, ethical and policy frameworks that largely evolved when access meant visiting a reading room.

Among the ways in which archives (and other collections) are now being accessed and interpreted outside of reading rooms, is through the medium of serious games (which have an educational or productive intent) and simulations. Mark Brogan and Martin Masek in '*AE2 Commander*' report on a project funded by an Ian Maclean Award to research the role of computer simulation in the archives online space. The *AE2 Commander* was an Australian submarine that played a role in World War I and the article explores the way in which simulations and serious games can use original archival sources about this vessel to not only inform game-play strategies, but also to raise awareness about those sources and what they can reveal.

Returning to the intersection of human rights and archives with which I began this editorial, this issue also features a co-authored article by Sue McKemmish, Livia Iacovino, Eric Ketelaar, Melissa Castan and Lynette Russell entitled 'Resetting relationships: archives and Indigenous human rights in Australia'. The article charts a way forward for Indigenous human rights in relation to archives in the absence of the Human Rights Act which the Australian Government decided not to pursue in 2010. In the absence of such an over-arching legislative framework, the authors propose ways in which archival institutions can realise Indigenous cultural rights in their programs and the professional conduct of the Australian archival and records community.

An exploration of how archives have been faring in relation to one of the aspects of this human rights agenda is the focus of Narissa Timbery in her article 'Archives and Indigenous Communities'. Timbery analyses a number of approaches taken to building relationships between Indigenous people and institutions based on recognition of the right to self-determination and

equality. To this end, Timbery examines the way in which archival institutions have pursued consultation with communities in relation to 'three archival initiatives that aimed at improving access and relationships between archival institutions, research and practice, and Indigenous communities.' One of her major findings is the continuing assumption of a 'one size fits all' approach to consulting very different communities about different initiatives.

In our Reflections section this issue, Kim Eberhard and Colleen McEwen report on the three-year campaign that resulted in the Universal declaration on archives, a statement of archival purpose and solidarity adopted by the International Council on Archives in September 2010. The declaration stresses the relationship between archives, human rights and government accountability. In our other contribution to the Reflections section, Stephen Yorke's 'Archivist in Egypt' takes us on a tour up the Nile, from the site of Alexandria's Great Library to the temple ruins of Abu Simbel. The episodes in this travel diary offer an occasion for some irreverent and thought-provoking reflections on the value of memory and archives, the perils of inadequate government funding and the lack of archival edifices in Australia.

This issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* appears without the News Notes and International News Notes sections that have been a feature of the journal until the November 2010 issue last year. In 2009 a review group convened by Council to make recommendations about the future of the journal proposed that the News Notes section should be removed from the journal and given a new forum for future publication. Council endorsed this recommendation on the proviso that both News Notes and International News Notes cease being published in the journal and instead be published together in a new forum. For a variety of reasons, that time has now arrived.

News Notes and International News Notes will this year be published as PDF files available via the ASA website and will transition next year to a more permanent publication format that is currently being developed by the ASA's National Office. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Helen McLaughlin, editor of News Notes, and David Roberts, editor of International News Notes, for their work on these vital channels of communication for archival professionals both in the Australia and in the Asia-Pacific region.

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