



## Re-designing the Archive

As I am writing from Melbourne under stage 4 restrictions, we are facing a world full of uncertainties. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live and the way we work. It has been difficult for everyone, but some of us have been touched harder than others. I wish to acknowledge all those who passed away and to extend my deepest condolences to their families and friends. One of the first Australian victims was Michael Saclier, the first president of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) who passed away on 3 April 2020. His obituary written by Pennie Pemberton and Ewan Maidment for this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* is a moving tribute to a doyen of Australian archivists. Michael Saclier will be remembered for the key role he played in the formation of the ASA and his advocacy for the independence of the profession of archivist, and for his development of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, which he led from 1972 to 1997. In their contribution, Pennie Pemberton and Ewan Maidment retrace crucial formative moments in the history of the ASA and the development of the archival profession in Australia.

The contributors to this issue wrote their contributions under difficult circumstances. I wish to thank all of them for persevering, meeting the deadlines and presenting us with contributions that challenge us to think about archives in different ways.

This issue includes five papers that were first presented at the joint ASA/ICA/ARANZ/PARBICA Conference held in Adelaide in October 2019. The theme of the Conference was ‘Designing the Archive’. Papers presented at the conference looked at ways of ‘putting people at the centre of what we do’ and at exploring ‘the use of empathy, creativity, innovation, experimentation, prototyping, and co-design in the development of recordkeeping systems, information governance frameworks, archival programs and services, archive buildings and spaces, or digital archives.’<sup>1</sup>

The 5 papers from the conference included in this issue all explore new ways to design or re-design the archives. Michael Smith and Janet Villata present the new user-centred design approach adopted by the City of Sydney Archives to transform its archives systems and processes to better meet user needs. Their paper discusses the tensions between archival practice and the user experience, and what actually may happen when the user is placed at the centre of design initiatives. Blanca Bazaco Palacios considers the archival characteristics of archives of social movements and archives that are assembled from the tributes to victims of terrorist attacks. She argues that these archives meet all the essential characteristics of archives and that they constitute an important component of social archives that deserve more attention from the archival profession than what they are currently getting. Vicenç Ruiz Gómez and Aniol Maria Vallès also turn their attention to the collection and exploitation of new types of archives, reporting on the experience of the Society of Catalan Archivists and Records Managers in archiving social media. They focus in particular on a project to archive 160,000 original tweets posted under the hashtag #Cuéntalo (the Spanish version of #MeToo) and to design – with the use of

a natural language processing algorithm – a dynamic and startling data visualisation of all the tweets involved.

Isabel Schellnack-Kelly's paper brings to the fore the need to address the issue of linguistic barriers that limit access to archives. Taking the case of South Africa, she shows that providing access to information in the user's mother tongue is a big challenge in a country that has eleven official languages and many other spoken languages, where archival collections are largely in English, in Dutch and in Afrikaans, and archival descriptions and finding aids are mostly in Afrikaans or in English, which makes them challenging to use by people unfamiliar with those languages and limits the accessibility of the collections. She stresses the importance of decolonising archival systems and the need to collect oral histories from diverse linguistic communities whose stories are not represented in the archives. Finally, Louis-Gilles Pairault presents his attempt at decolonising archives of slavery by transposing in modern English the tale of an eighteenth-century enslaved princess and giving a voice to people who are not usually represented in the archives.

With the COVID-19 pandemic leading to increased use of digital records in many countries around the world, problems are likely to arise when people will want to use those records as evidence. In the last article included in this issue, Weimei Pan and Luciana Duranti discuss the difficulties involved with getting digital records accepted as evidence in legal proceedings in China. They analyse the reasons why evidence collection and preservation by a third party has become a popular approach to guarantee the integrity of the records and improve their chances of admissibility in a court of law. They show how the InterPARES Trust PaaST model can help address some of the issues, thus demonstrating the relevance of archival knowledge to the digital transition.

The challenge ahead for archivists will be to re-design the archives for the new post-COVID-19 environment, to re-design archival systems and archival practices that are people-centred and inclusive and can accommodate different ways of working and interacting with archives. Whether they work in their offices or from home, record-keepers need to continue to create and capture records for evidence and accountability purposes while services need to be redesigned for working online or in hybrid forms. While many collecting activities have sprung up to document the pandemic, the crucial activities of creating and managing records must continue to be performed to produce the records that the society needs now and will need in the future. At the same time, with work moving to online formats, new opportunities have arisen to participate in online meetings and conferences for people who may not have been able to attend in person, opening new forums for discussing ideas, rethinking our ways of working and re-designing the archives for the post-COVID-19 world.

## Note

1. <<https://www.archivists.org.au/conference/2019-designing-the-archive>>, accessed 10 September 2020.

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