



Michael John Saclier, 1937–2020

Michael Saclier, a doyen of Australian archivists, passed away on 3 April, aged 82, a tragic victim of COVID-19. Michael worked at the Archives Office of NSW after he finished university. In 1968 he became Principal Archivist in the Archives Office of Tasmania. From 1972 until his retirement in 1997 Michael was the Archives Officer at the Archives of Business and Labour (now the Noel Butlin Archives Centre) at the Australian National University. Michael was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian Society of Archivists and was its first President from 1975 to 1977. He was respected by his staff, readers, depositors and his archival colleagues, who awarded him honorary membership of the ASA in 1985 in recognition of his unique contribution to the profession.¹

Michael was born in Sydney, the son of Ian Saclier and Katharine ‘Kit’ Murray. He had one older brother, Timothy. As a child, Michael went to Catholic schools in Sydney, mainly in Mosman. In 1946, after Ian Saclier returned from 6 years of war service, the family moved to Queensland to take up farming. In Queensland, Michael went to various parochial schools and the correspondence school as his family moved from farm to farm. In 1950 Michael went to board at Eagle Heights Marist College on Mount Tamborine and, after his parents separated, he boarded at St Gregory’s Marist Brothers College, Campbelltown, NSW. Michael recalled that St Gregory’s was an agricultural school for boys interested in pursuing a life on the land, not an academically orientated school. A voracious reader and not very gregarious, Michael found St Gregory’s ‘even more hellish’ than Eagle Heights. A good scholar in most subjects, Michael particularly liked biological science and after completing the leaving certificate chose to study science at the University of Queensland.²

Not well prepared for university studies, Michael failed the first year. He then shifted to Sydney where he started a part-time Arts course at Sydney University in 1959 while working briefly as a Clerk in the Department of Labour and National Service and then mainly at the Law Book Company as an editorial assistant. In 1964, when undergraduate research in Australian history was uncommon, Michael completed a full-time honours year in History, submitting his thesis on visitors to the Australian colonies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, supervised by Hazel King. He read NSW Governors’ despatches, AJCP microfilms, manuscripts, memoirs and newspapers and other sources at the Mitchell Library, where Pat Beddie was in charge of the Reading Room and became acquainted with a number of the staff members and scholars such as Manning Clark and Ian Turner.

The archives office of NSW and the archives office of Tasmania

Baiba Berzins and Michael were both History Honours students at Sydney University in 1964. Baiba wrote that Michael’s path into the archives profession was much more direct than her own: ‘he went straight into archives administration after leaving the hallowed

institution on the hill above Broadway. He knew what most Australians, including me, did not: that there was such a profession.³

In fact, as Michael recorded in his oral history interview, Jo McIntyre, who was then a Library Assistant at the Mitchell Library, had invited Michael to the Library's Christmas party where she suggested that he finds work at the Mitchell Library and should go to see Ron McGreal, the State Librarian. McGreal graciously informed Michael that, although there were no jobs open at the Mitchell, one was going in the Archives Office. Michael was interviewed for 10 or 15 minutes by Russell Doust, the Senior Archivist, and was appointed as an Archives Assistant to start in the New Year, January 1965. Michael commented that 'nobody ever plans to be an Archivist'.

The Archives Office was located in two basement floors of a newly built wing on the Domain side of the State Library. Most of the records were held on site. Readers used the Mitchell Library reading room. Rare visits were made to the 'absolutely diabolical'⁴ woolsheds at Shea's Creek to retrieve records. Michael's duties involved arrangement and description, reference work on roster, supervision of readers and retrieval. Michael proudly remembered seeking Lawrence Hargarve's letter announcing his discovery of gold, at the request of Manning Clark, and locating it in the famously difficult Colonial Secretary's correspondence series.

Michael did not have formal training in archives administration. In his oral history interview, he explained that he attempted to enrol in the Library course to undertake the Archives options, but John Metcalfe, who was in charge of the UNSW Library School, had insisted that Michael complete three units of cataloguing before taking the Archives options. Instead, Michael learnt on the job working with the Archives' six other staff – Dawn Troy, Peter Orlovich, Brian Stuckey, Jill Caldwell and Dick Rothwell. Series were explicated in detail and item listed in accordance with the model espoused by Dr Schellenberg during his visit to Australia ten years earlier. Michael's major processing task was compiling inventories of records of NSW District Councils dating from 1842. There was little proactive searching for records, but Michael did travel with Russell Doust to Broken Hill on one occasion to collect outlying records.

In May 1967 Michael commenced a Commonwealth Research Scholarship at Sydney University working on an MA thesis on the administration of Governor Ralph Darling in NSW from 1825 to 1831. Michael married Wendy Mildren in April 1967 and, later that year, on the recommendation of Russell Doust, Michael was appointed Principal Archivist of the Archives Office of Tasmania, succeeding the late remarkable Peter Eldershaw. Michael's research project was shelved after they moved to Hobart.

In May 1968 Michael commenced duty as the statutory officer in charge of the Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), within the State Library of Tasmania, with responsibilities to preserve and provide access to public records, including local government records, and control their disposal. The AOT also administered holdings of colonial newspapers, Australian Joint Copying Project microfilms and private records, such as the Van Diemen's Land Company, the Crowther Collection and the papers of Clifford Craig.

Michael joined a small dedicated staff of archivists: Mary McCrae, Ian Pearce, Bill Taylor and Margaret Littlejohn. The Archives was temporarily located in the first stage of the new State Library building, pending transfer to the 6th and 7th floors of the Tower then under construction. More modern records, subject to recall by Departments, were stored in a vault under the Supreme Court in Franklin Square,⁵ while older records in

more constant use by researchers were held on site in the State Library building. Over the following 4 years a major preoccupation of the Archives staff was organising and making more detailed finding aids for the records to be transferred to the new building, which in fact did not occur until after Michael had left.

Michael found Tasmanian Government Departmental Secretaries and even Ministers were approachable and sympathetic. Surveys, listings, assessments, disposals and transfers of records of the Attorney-Generals, Premier's, Education, Police and Prisons Departments were made, and systematic records management encouraged. The Hydro Electric and Forestry Commissions were not cooperative. Much effort was also put into salvaging local government archives following Council mergers and persuading Town Clerks to follow record-keeping practices. Michael found time to visit King Island to see the Harbour Master, without much success, and to travel to Queenstown with Mary McCrae trying to collect records of the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company which eventually were transferred to the Tasmanian Archives.

The Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University

Michael had missed out on the position of Archives Officer at the ANU Archives in 1968, when Robert (Bob) Sharman got the job. His chance came up again when Sharman left to become Assistant State Librarian in South Australia.

In July 1972 Michael Saclier and his family moved to Canberra and he took up his duties as Archives Officer at the vaguely named either 'ANU Archives' (which it was not) or the 'Archives Unit' in the Research School of Social Sciences (RSSH), at the Australian National University.

The Archives had been established at ANU in 1956, the first business archives in the country (followed by the University of Melbourne in 1962). Twenty-five years on, Michael noted that eight universities then held business and industrial archives (ANU, Melbourne, Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Armidale and Townsville), several large firms (notably BHP, Westpac and the National Australia Bank) made internal provision for their archives, and other collections were to be found in the State Libraries.⁶

When Michael arrived, the ANU Archives occupied approximately 10,000 shelf feet (3,000 shelf metres), housed mainly (on compactus) in the newly built hemi-hexagon at the back of the Coombs Building but also in a remnant of its former repository (the only access down a steep staircase), in a nearby basement and a cottage (now the Gardeners' Depot, formerly part of the Canberra Cottage Hospital). The holdings were categorised as 'records, pamphlets, [some bound volumes of] newspapers and microfilm [notably the records of the AWU Queensland Branch]'.⁷

The collection reflected the research interests of Professor Noel Butlin and his colleagues in the Department of Economic History, RSSH, in pastoral finance in the late nineteenth century, such as the Australian Agricultural Company (AACo), Elders Smith Goldsborough Mort Ltd (Elders GM), and Squatting Investment Co Ltd, as well as a small and growing collection of trade union papers reflecting the research interests of labour historians. In 1973, 850 daily visits were reported, mostly long-term PhD candidates working on a single collection.

From the beginning, Michael sought to widen the scope of the collection – in the first instance to urban manufacturing companies and employer organisations. Over the next years, the substantial records of Humes Ltd (concrete pipes), Dalgety's, CSR Ltd, Tooth & Co,

Adelaide Steamship Company with many others joined the AACo and Elder GM on the shelves.

In 1976 Michael went to the UK to oversee the transfer of the records of the about-to-be-closed London office of the AACo (together with those of the Peel River Land & Mineral Company). At the same time, he negotiated the deposit of the London records of Dalgety-New Zealand Loan Ltd.

With the encouragement of the ACTU and labour historians, the trade union collection grew too, finally representing most areas of industrial activity. The records of employer organisations and some professional associations were also sought and deposited. In 1975, the Archives Unit was renamed with the more descriptive title – the Archives of Business and Labour (ABL), RSSS.

Space was always a problem. The University was expanding; office space was at a premium. Covetous eyes were cast on Archives' area on the ground floor of the RSSS hemi-hexagon (designed to be easily converted into offices). Talk of housing the archives in the basement of a proposed addition to Menzies Library persisted but never eventuated.

In 1978 Michael jumped at the chance to take up the University's offer of 3,880 square metres on the lower floor of the structure above the Acton Tunnel, then being built to take Parkes Way under the University Campus (See [Figure 1](#)). Ideal in many ways, it had



Figure 1. Unloading a consignment of records received by the Archives of Business and Labour in Repository A in the Tunnel, Acton Underhill: Pennie Pemberton (Deputy Archives Officer) and Michael Saclier (Archives Officer) on the left; Charles Dawson (Repository Manager) on the right, with one of Charles' team of students, centre, c.1981.

one major problem – designed as a carpark, it had a low floor loading – ruling out the use of compactus. Michael worked with enthusiasm to overcome this problem with carefully placed static shelving and wide aisles, a blessing to those pushing trolleys.

With most of the internal fitting-out done in-house by the University Works Department, the collection (3,697 shelf metres) was moved into the new space by January 1981. The office and reading rooms followed in April, and the venue was opened by the Deputy Vice Chancellor on 25 September. Michael was very proud of the unique experience of having 100% expansion room. The structure was renamed Acton Underhill in 1980 but remains ‘The Tunnel’.

The Archives’ staff level rose from 5 to 7 early in Michael’s time. With a keen interest in promoting professionalism in the Archives’ community, he was a great supporter of the University of NSW Archives Diploma course in Archives Administration and recruited largely from that source. He also fought at length for recognition of status and appropriate salaries of his staff within the ANU.

Michael was an early advocate of computers (the first terminal had its own room in the new offices, see [Figure 2](#)). It was first used to prepare the annual *List of Holdings* and the occasional newsletter, *ABLative*. Both were distributed widely to archival institutions, libraries and university departments with relevant interests. (Both were supplanted by the

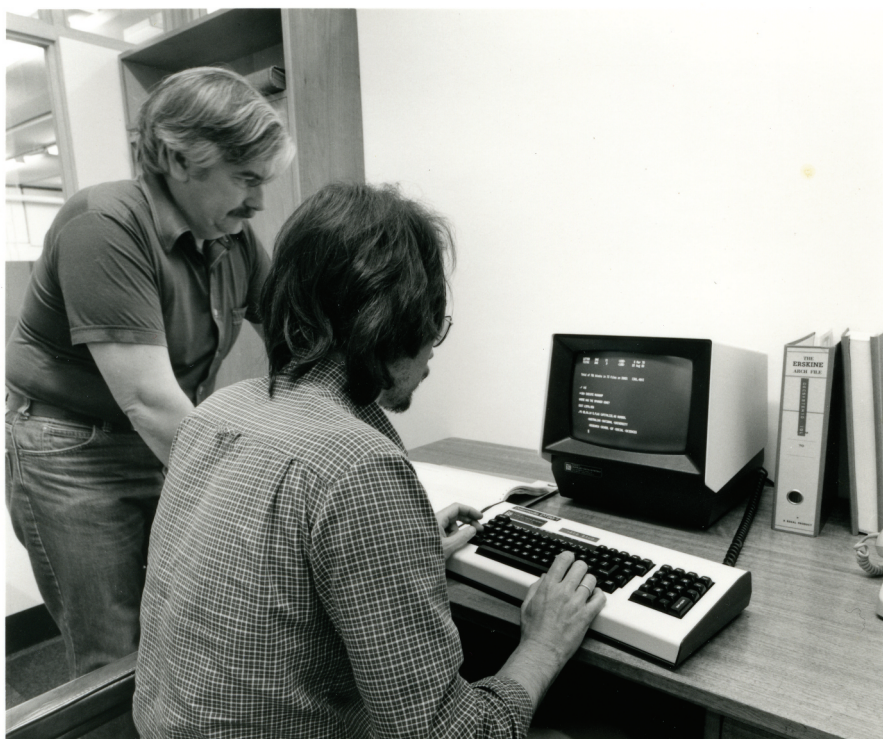


Figure 2. Michael Saclier and Tam Best and ‘the computer’ (Mark II), n.d.

Webpage in 1995.) Michael also began work on a database of the holdings, including a catalogue of the Archives' holdings of maps and plans.

He was also an advocate of conservation – not so much of the individual artefact, but rather the basic conservation and preservation of paper records, preferably on the large scale. To this end, funds were raised, and a basic conservation area was established in a cottage adjoining Acton Underhill. Michael had plans for conservation workshops, but the matter lapsed in difficult economic times.

However, seminars intended to introduce intending honours students and new post-graduate students to the world of archives in general and the ABL collections in particular were a great success. So too were tours for the UNSW Archives Diploma course students and others on their visits to Canberra to view the national collections.⁸

Discussions and plans for associating the ABL with the University's own archives went on for 6 years, 1974 to 1980, but the merger did not eventuate until 1998 when Kathryn Dan and then Sigrid McCausland were appointed as the first University Archivists.

Professor Noel Butlin died in April 1991. By June, RSSS Faculty had agreed to the renaming of the Archives as the Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC), 'in honour of the late Professor Noel Butlin who had been instrumental in the establishment of the Archives, and had been a distinguished scholar in the Research School over a number of years'.⁹ The newly named Centre was opened in April 1992 (Figure 3). It was seen as an 'opportunity to reassess and refocus collecting strategies and to explore repositioning the Centre in relation to its user clientele'.¹⁰

In fact, the Archives was to be a victim of Michael's success. In response to changes in industrial legislation and union movement policies driving a fundamental restructure of the Australian trade union movement, the trade union collection rapidly expanded in the late



Figure 3. Michael Saclier addressing the audience at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre renaming ceremony, April 1992, with Dr Cameron Hazlehurst, 'Keeper' of the Archives, in the background.

1980s and 1990s, accommodating massive bodies of displaced records, and finally representing most Federally registered industrial organisations (except the Clerks and Electrical Trades Union) and many of their predecessors. The collection was now standing at 13,000 shelf metres (and more space was needed) and it covered a much wider range of holdings – not least, the National HIV/AIDS Collection, and the archives of the Institute of Public Affairs and the Australian Conservation Foundation, and a major deposit of Friendly Society lodge records from Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows-Victoria.

Daily visits to Centre were now running at 1,400 a year, besides mail and telephone queries. Researchers ranged across many disciplines: 'eclectic social research'. They came from many universities across Australia with an increasing number from British and North American universities. Many more private researchers, local and family historians also made their way to The Tunnel. The Archives now had little in common with its parent body, the Research School of Social Sciences.

The NBAC was reviewed in 1987, favourably, and again in 1995. The latter report was never finalised and engendered uncertainty in users and prospective depositors alike. Staff numbers were cut and charges (both on users and depositors) were discussed. Closure was on the cards. Michael battled on for a year or so, before retiring on 27 March 1997, after 25 years in office. The Annual Report recorded: 'the staff will miss his professionalism and good humour but will endeavour to carry on the 'good fight'



Figure 4. Some current and former NBAC staff and colleagues at Michael Saclier's farewell party ('retiring after 25 years of dedicated, entertaining and stupendous service'), 21 March 1997: (l-r) Charles Dawson, Ben Natali (with child), Barry Howarth, Jill Caldwell, Pennie Pemberton, Colleen McEwen, Michael Saclier, Clive Beeson, Tam Best, Caroline McNally, Maureen Purtell, Janet Howse, Tatiana Antsoupova, Kate Harrington (a student on placement at the NBAC), Raj Jadeja and Emma Jolley.

in his name'. Michael's farewell party was largely attended by current and former staff, researchers and depositors – as the invitation read 'it was the end of an era' (see [Figure 4](#)).

The archives section of the Library Association of Australia

Michael mentioned in his oral history interview that he was attracted to work at the ANU Archives by the professionalism of its staff. He complimented his career in archives administration with passionate advocacy for the archival profession. In 1985 the Australian Society of Archivists awarded Michael an honorary membership in recognition of his enthusiasm as convenor of the Steering Committee that laid the groundwork for the formation of the Society and for his continuing commitment as its foundation President from 1975 to 1977.¹¹

The Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia (LAA) was formally constituted in 1951 'to promote the preservation and study of archives and manuscripts'.¹² In 1954, following the Schellenberg seminars in Canberra, an 'underground' archives journal was privately produced: *The Bulletin for Australian Archivists*, subtitled, 'edited on behalf of all Australian Archivists by H.J. Gibbney B.A. (Hons), Commonwealth National Library, and A. Horton B.A., Public Library of New South Wales'. Bob Sharman (Archives Office of Tasmania) also collaborated on its production. In August 1955, during the LAA Conference in Brisbane, the Archives Section decided to take control of the *Bulletin*. It was renamed *Archives and Manuscripts (A&M)* at the suggestion of the Mitchell Librarian, Phyllis Mander-Jones. The first issue of *A&M* was published in November 1955, edited by Mander-Jones and Allan Horton. Jim Gibbney was Editor of subsequent issues of *A&M* up to Vol. 1, No. 6, November 1959, when Bob Sharman took over.¹³

During 1958 meetings of archivists discussed breaking away from the LAA to form an Australian Institute of Archivists. A constitution was proposed and a steering committee set up consisting of Ian Maclean, Thea Exley, Stewart Broadhead, Bruce Burne (Archives Division, CNL), Harry Nunn, Martin Merchant (Archives Department, Public Library of Victoria), and Bob Sharman (Tasmania).¹⁴ The movement collapsed, partly because a number of influential archivists declined the Steering Committee's invitation to become foundation members.¹⁵ In 1974 Thea Exley explained that the committee 'finally decided that it was not a viable proposition at that time because of the small potential membership'. Exley added that in the meantime a fair proportion of archivists remained in the Archives Section of the LAA, partly because most State archives were still subordinate to library managements which usually insisted on Library qualifications and membership of the LAA.¹⁶

In early 1972 Michael's 'rather over strenuous prose' had threatened a breach with his friend Bob Sharman. As Editor of *Archives and Manuscripts*, Sharman had taken the liberty of revising a damning commentary by Michael on the LAA Archives Administration syllabus to read that, regarding LAA papers 101–103, 'few subjects could be more irrelevant'.¹⁷

Michael was offended by Sharman's editorial intervention, but just after arriving at the ANU Archives in August 1972, he wrote to Sharman offering an olive branch. Sharman replied in October stating that for many years he had advocated that: (1) archives institutions, at least at the government level, should be independent of library organisations; (2) the archivists of Australia should form their own independent

organisation; (3) at least one university or college in Australia should have a post-graduate course in archives administration and that (4) if an Australian society of archivists were formed, an effort should be made to take over *Archives and Manuscripts*.

Furthermore, Sharman advised Michael that he believed that most, if not all, the archivists who were members of the Archives Section of the Library Association would be in favour of a separate society. Lastly, Sharman, who was returning to librarianship as the Assistant State Librarian of South Australia, made it clear to Michael that someone else would have to take on the job of forming a professional organisation of archivists.¹⁸

Michael wrote back confirming that Sharman's views on the formation of an association of Archivists were very close to his own, and reported that he and Gerald Fischer, of the University of Sydney Archives, had been sounding out opinion on the matter.¹⁹

Sharman repeated his challenge in a circular sent to archivists in June 1973: 'If Australia is to continue to have an archives journal ... You should see that some organisation other than the Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia takes over responsibility for it'. In response, Michael wrote a letter to the editor titled, 'The future of *Archives and Manuscripts*', published in the August 1973 issue of *A&M*, in which he speculated on the meaning of professionalism and its implications for the journal:

A new editor is likely to have no more success than the present one unless we decide to act like professionals and support our professional journal actively ... A profession might be defined (and I have no doubt many will differ with me) as a group bound together by the exercise of common skills in the pursuit of common goals and subscribing to a common ethic. Are Australian archivists a profession in the light of this definition? I think they are ... But one important factor is that they lack a professional body to set professional standards of training, practice and conduct, to act as guardian of those standards and to promote the interests and objects of the profession.

Michael accepted Sharman's challenge with a clear picture in mind of the work involved:

My present and growing conviction is that the time has come to forget the failures of the past and to make a new attempt to organise ourselves in a society which can lead and support the archivists of Australia in their professional lives.

This is not something to be embarked on lightly or quickly. It requires organisation, support and careful planning, it requires consultation, discussion and mature consideration by members of the profession.²⁰

Michael stated in his oral history interview that three factors favoured the new attempt to form a society of archivists: meetings of archivists and associated discussions occasioned by the visit of the Canadian Dr W. Kaye Lamb, former Dominion Archivist, commissioned to advise on the development of a national archives system; the establishment of a post-graduate archives administration course at the University of NSW in 1973 and the inactivity of the Archives Section of the LAA between General Meetings held at Biennial Conferences of the Library Association.

In August 1973 a Steering Committee to investigate and promote the formation of an association of archivists was established in Perth at a meeting associated with the Biennial General Meeting of the Archives Section of the LAA. It coincided with a meeting of ANZAAS at which the Australian Historical Association was formed, as well as

a National Conservation Seminar where the Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material was formed. Michael participated in all three events and reported on each of them in his new *A&M* column, 'Miscellany', which carried 'notes on products, publications, people, techniques and events likely to be of interest to archivists'.²¹

The steering committee consisted of Michael as convener, John Cross (Archives Office of NSW), Pat Quinn (Bank of NSW) and Gerald Fischer (University of Sydney Archives). Chris Hurley was co-opted as a representative of the Commonwealth Archives Office (CAO) in December 1973 and was later replaced by Max Franklin (CAO) when Hurley was transferred to London. Corresponding members to liaise with the profession in the States were also appointed: John Love (SA State Archives), Paul Wilson (Queensland State Archives), Margaret Medcalf (Battye Library and Archives in WA), Mary McRae (Archives Office of Tasmania), and Anne Green (CAO, Melbourne).

The Steering Committee established that support existed among archivists working at the Commonwealth Archives, tested meticulously detailed models of the proposed organisation by a nation-wide survey of archivists, organised consultative meetings in all States, addressed the vexed question of membership categories and qualifications for professional recognition, distributed membership application forms, and reported on progress towards its objectives in *Newsletters* published between April 1974 and March 1975.²²

The Australian Society of Archivists

Finally, a draft constitution was hammered out which was taken to the Inaugural General Meeting of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA), held in Seminar Room A in the Coombs Building at the ANU on 5 and 6 April 1975, and adopted with minor amendments. The Steering Committee was disbanded, having achieved its goal, but it was not the end of the task for Michael who then took on the role of President of the ASA. The other members of the first ASA Council were Ian Maclean (Vice-President), Patricia Quinn (Secretary), Max Franklin (Treasurer), Andrew Lemon (Editor), and Lee McGregor, Peter Orlovich, Diane Patenall and Ian Peace (Councillors). Regional convenors were appointed to call local meetings and liaise between the Council and local members.

The LAA wound up its Archives Section at its conference in Melbourne in September 1975. Michael wrote to the LAA acknowledging that 'archivists in Australia have a considerable debt to the LAA under whose aegis they have sheltered for so long'.²³ The ASA took over *Archives and Manuscripts* from the Library Association, publishing its first issue, Vol. 6, No. 6, in February 1976, together with a bimonthly *ASA Bulletin* which was first published in May 1975, both edited by Andrew Lemon. The Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services (AACOBS) agreed to allow the ASA to nominate an archival representative (previously nominated by the LAA). The Special Minister of State, Lionel Bowen, was lobbied seeking ASA representation on the proposed Australian Archives Task Force.

The Society connected with Bruce Burne (National Archives of Fiji) and archivists in Papua New Guinea and New Zealand. In 1976 the ASA was admitted as a Category B member of the International Council on Archives (ICA) and Ian Maclean had discussions about a proposed Pacific Regional Branch at its conference in Washington. Peter

Orlovich and Diane Patenall started work on developing a *Directory of Australian, New Zealand and SW Pacific Archives and Manuscript Repositories*.

Lee McGregor convened a subcommittee to investigate conservation training and how to tackle it at a national level, and with Michael lobbied strongly in support of introducing a course for conservators at the Canberra College of Advanced Education. Ian Maclean and Michael addressed Commonwealth government neglect and underfunding of the Australian Archives. Michael presented a submission on the operations of the Australian Archives to its Director-General, Professor RG Neale, in May 1977. Ian Pearce lobbied the Tasmanian government over proposed changes to the relationship between the Tasmanian Archives Office and the State Library.

The ASA Council addressed internal matters, forming sub-committees to review its constitution, administer its membership, and oversee its financial management. Branches were established in Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. Michael prepared *By-Law No.1, Regional Organisation*, at the direction of Council, having entered into an acrimonious debate in the *ASA Bulletin* with Anne Green, Melbourne Branch Chair, over participatory democracy in the Society's decision-making. By the Biennial General Meeting in May 1977, membership totalled 235 (137 professional members, 98 associate members).

In his Council report to the Biennial General Meeting on 14 May 1975, Michael said that he was stepping down 'with both relief and regret, relief at no longer having to carry the burden of the past 2 years, regret at leaving so many things undone or unfinished or still potential'. Michael added that 'I would ... cherish the hope that I may be able to contribute further to an organization which is very close to my heart'.²⁴

In his professional life, Michael was a leader by nature. He was most comfortable in command of the ship and from the bridge he gave colleagues encouragement, opportunities and scope to exercise their professional abilities. Michael's next and last major opportunity to lead the archival profession at a national level was his role in the formation of the Australian Council of Archives.

The Australian Council of Archives

Baiba Berzins reported that there was a 'feeling in the Society and in the archival community that there was a need for some formal means of facilitating communication and cooperation between archival institutions and for articulating coordinated views'.²⁵ In response to a resolution, moved by Michael, of the 1979 ASA Biennial General Meeting (BGM) in Sydney, the ASA established an *ad hoc* National Consultative Machinery Committee (NCMC) to 'inquire into the question of consultative machinery for the community of archival institutions'.²⁶

Chris Hurley was elected Convenor of the NCMC, and Michael was elected as a member of the Committee.²⁷ The NCMC focused on the work of the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographic Services (AACOBS) which claimed to speak for the whole community of libraries and archives in Australia. The Committee felt that, even though Michael had represented the ASA on AACOBS since 1975, the peak council had failed to adequately represent the interests of archivists and archival institutions. In particular, the Committee was concerned that the ASA was marginalised in AACOBS

and would be excluded if proposed changes to the AACOBS constitution were approved.²⁸

Hurley presented the NCMC's comprehensive *Report* to the ASA BGM in Melbourne in May 1981. It recommended that the Society consider supporting the establishment of a new body, quite separate from AACOBS, with 'the aim of inducing the institutions . . . to take up the question for themselves to form the body, and to decide what its role and functions might be'.²⁹ The BGM accepted the Committee's recommendations in full and adopted a policy of support for the concept of a separate national consultative body for archives and records offices.³⁰

The National Consultative Machinery Committee was reconstituted for a further 2 years, with Michael as Convenor. Its instructions were to circulate Hurley's *Report* to all institutional members of the ASA for comment, together with a questionnaire, to collate the responses and, if the outcome of the survey were favourable, organise a preliminary meeting of representatives of archives institutions to consider the shape of the proposed archival body.³¹

The organisational method of the campaign to build a peak council of archival institutions was similar to that used to separate the ASA from the Library Association, but Michael's strategic skills were essential to the success of both campaigns. They are illustrated in his correspondence with Lindsay Cleland in July 1981.

Cleland, the ASA President, wrote to Michael as Convenor of the Consultative Machinery Committee, pointing out that AACOBS would be again considering revisions to its constitution at its annual meeting in August and suggesting that this would give the ASA an opportunity to approach ACCOBS to seek membership of its National Council and to table Hurley's NCMC *Report*.³²

Michael's wrote back to Cleland, without consulting his fellow committee members due to time constraints, explaining in tactical detail how such an approach was bound to fail. Addressing Cleland's fall-back position of simply separating from AACOBS, Michael wrote that it is 'unnecessary and provocative. Unnecessary because AACOBS is in fact withdrawing from us . . . provocative because it would involve giving reasons for our departure and those would be difficult to frame without stating the unpalatable'.³³

Peter Orlovich wrote to Cleland confirming his concurrence with the views in Michael's letter and adding that Michael's

letter expresses resolute, but well-tempered views on the matter, and will allow posterity to judge that the course of action which we are now obliged to take was not hasty and ill-conceived but based upon mature and prudent deliberation.³⁴

The Consultative Machinery Committee reported to the 1983 ASA BGM in Adelaide that an overwhelming majority of institutions surveyed favoured the formation of a national consultative body and, under the auspices of the ASA, Michael was charged with organising a meeting to inaugurate the new body. He convened the meeting attended by representatives of 26 institutions at the Archives of Business and Labour in November 1984. Michael reported to the *Canberra Times* that it was an opportunity to allow an exchange of ideas on archival methods and promotion of the standardisation of archival techniques and controls with 'the potential to greatly improve effectiveness of archives throughout Australia and to make their information more readily available to the public'.³⁵ The meeting approved 'in principle the formation of an organisation of

archival institutions to provide a continuing basis for cooperation and consultation between those institutions' and appointed a drafting committee consisting of Michael, Baiba Berzins (Mitchell Library) and Clive Smith (Westpac Archives) to work on a constitution and an administrative plan.³⁶

The organisation, known as the National Archival Forum, was formally established at an inaugural meeting held in Canberra at the Australian Archives on 4 July 1985. Peter Crush was elected inaugural President/Secretary and 'a year later handed over to his successors a functioning Council representing some 40 institutions'.³⁷ The name was changed to the Australian Council of Archives at its first annual meeting in June 1986 and it continued to operate under that name until it folded in 2000³⁸.

A new sense of identity

In April 1975 Peter Orlovich addressed the Inaugural General Meeting of the ASA on 'the Education and Training of Archivists'.³⁹ He argued that the Diploma in Archives Administration course at the University of NSW would help to create 'a more favourable environment within which [the ASA] may take root' and that the course was already fostering among graduates 'a new sense of identity – that is to say, a feeling of belonging to a distinctive profession, an emerging profession, and one that is as yet in its infancy in Australia'.⁴⁰

Reviewing the progress of the ASA in 1985,⁴¹ Michael could claim that archival profession had taken shape, observing that

the Society has grown, and without doubt it represents a major part in the professional life of its members and influences many outside its ranks ... and the major benefit which we hoped for in instigating the Society – the fostering and development of a professional identity amongst archivists – is no doubt a reality.⁴²

Michael pointed to the relatively low professional membership amongst those with a 'clerk mentality' at Australian Archives and conceded that the ASA did not have the authority to exercise control over who might practice the profession, nevertheless he maintained that

archivists today are professionally more self-aware, more sophisticated and better informed than they were. There is much more interchange between archivists and between archives. In short I believe that there has been an improvement in the profession and its environment [a substantial part of which] can be laid at the door of the ASA. For that reason alone I am very proud to have been associated with its beginnings.⁴³

Even now, the success of the ASA can be measured by its effective advocacy on archival issues, its involvement in regional and international archival organisations, the vibrancy of its conferences, the consistent scholarly and professional strength of papers published in its journal, the popularity of its ground-breaking textbook, *Keeping Archives*, and the value of its online courses and toolkits.

Michael's own advocacy for the archival profession worked at two levels. On the one hand, as a master strategist and accomplished campaigner, he helped to establish the ASA as a means of developing the independence of the profession of archivists and of expressing their collective interests.

On the other hand, Michael demonstrated his professional skills by developing and expanding the holdings of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre and maintaining effective control over the archives in his custody. At the same time, Michael exercised his somewhat eccentric managerial skills by encouraging his staff to pursue their particular archival talents and interests to the utmost extent and by creating a social milieu in the Archives of collegiality inclusive of both archivists and researchers based on mutual respect.

Remembering his post-graduate research at the Archives of Business and Labour, Professor Frank Bongiorno wrote, 'it's those morning and afternoon teas at the Archives, where all manner of things found their way into the conversation, that I most vividly recall about those years'. Bongiorno's point was that 'this personal dimension to the relationship so many of us enjoyed with the Noel Butlin Archives and its staff made the ANU's attempt to close it all the more traumatic'.⁴⁴

A final measure of the outcome of Michael's advocacy was the successful defence of the NBAC. Peter Orlovich designed his course for the education of professional archivists based on Jenkinson's maxim that the duties of archivists are: firstly, to take all possible precautions for the safeguarding of their archives and for their custody; and only secondly (i.e. consequent on safe custody of the archives), to meet the needs of researchers to the best of their ability.⁴⁵

The sustained attack on the NBAC over the years from 1994 to 2001 threatened dispersal and closure of the Archives. Even after Michael himself had become a casualty, the attack was resisted by dedicated current and former NBAC archivists, who had, in Orlovich's terms, *a deep conviction that their primary and inescapable responsibility is towards the archives*.⁴⁶ A successful defence was mounted, with the strident support of the ASA and an alliance of academics and other researchers, trade unionists and a number of Federal politicians, together with their organisations, such as the Australian Historical Association, the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, the Academy of Social Sciences, the Australasian Political Studies Association, the National Library, the National Archives, various trade unions, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Labour Party and the Australian Senate.

The resurrection of the NBAC, stabilised, well staffed and in the professional hands of the ANU Archivist, if under the umbrella of the ANU Library for administrative expedience, is a further tribute to the efforts of Michael and his contemporaries in establishing a distinctive archival profession in Australia.

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Addendum

In response to a request from the ASA council for recollections of former colleagues of Michael Saclier, Chris Hurley, with the assistance of Michael Piggott, wrote:⁴⁷

In 1970, many archivists in Australia were employed as librarians, we were a special interest group within the Library Association (LAA), most government archivists in Canberra and Melbourne stood apart, Archives and Manuscripts was published by the LAA, archives studies (if offered at all) were a specialisation within postgraduate courses for librarians, there was no tertiary qualification and no basis for designating any job as archivist, we had no identifiable voice as advocates for ourselves or our

mission. No one could say without contradiction or demur what it meant to be an archivist. Within a decade, this had all changed and Michael Saclier played a leading role in that.

A process was well under way to separate all the government archives from the libraries, the ASA had been formed and took over as publisher of Archives and Manuscripts, a definition of professional archivist was embedded in the ASA Constitution, some employers began using it as a basis for recruitment (Michael amongst them at the Archives of Business & Labour), post graduate courses specialising in archives were being offered and we accredited them, we had been given a seat on AACOBS (the peak council representing libraries and archives institutions) on which Michael was our representative. Shortly thereafter, when AACOBS reconstituted itself and denied us a guaranteed seat, he was instrumental in forming the (now defunct) Australian Council of Archives (ACA), as the peak body within the archives industry. It was now possible to identify more clearly who we were.

In the August 1973 issue of Archives & Manuscripts, Michael issued a call to arms and continued to stir interest from then on until May 1975 in a column called 'Miscellany'. He knew that a professional body could not do without the participation of archivists at the CAO (Commonwealth Archives Office, now National Archives) and that most of those employed there would not join the LAA. That guided his strategic efforts against push-back from colleagues who did not want to separate. Meetings were organised in Canberra to seek agreement and hammer out the form and purpose of a proposed society. Often they were held after hours on CAO premises. This was the first exposure for many of us employed there to a professional discourse outside of work. Michael wrote up the discussions, coordinating with parallel meetings held in other cities around the country. He prepared and circulated options papers and, in due course, conducted postal ballots. In 1974, he chaired the drafting committee that wrote the ASA Constitution. Following the inaugural meeting in 1975, he became the ASA's first President.

For the role he played in all this, Michael should never be forgotten. But after that things fell apart and we do not honour him by glossing over that. The attempt to establish a professional job category based on a tertiary qualification failed – partly because of massive changes in the job market and partly because of a failure to align properly with records managers (despite good will on both sides and commitments to a common purpose). Confusion over our never-reconciled roles in recordkeeping and cultural heritage persists. The ASA has effectively abandoned the role of professional body ('a group, of people in a learned occupation who are entrusted with maintaining control or oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation'). The ACA was wound up leaving non-government archives institutions without a presence in the public policy discourse. Some of our government archives have disappeared back into library structures.

This is not a story of failure, however, individual or collective. This is an account of archives and archivists (however we think of them) engaged in a struggle to survive and evolve. Michael Saclier's part during an important stage in that struggle was an heroic one.

Notes

1. The authors wish to acknowledge and thank Wendy Saclier and her family for reading the draft and Timothy Saclier for information supplied. We are also grateful to Colleen McEwen

- for her guides to the ASA records and her summary of Michael Saclier's career, Ian Pearce for checking the draft account of Michael's work at the Archives Office of Tasmania, Barry Howarth for carefully proofing our draft, and Cameron Hazlehurst, Maureen Purtell, Helen Creagh and other former staff members of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre for their reminiscences and advice. Thanks, too, to the NBAC archivists for their assistance.
2. Michael Saclier and Baiba Berzins, *Michael Saclier interviewed by Baiba Berzins in the Australian Society of Archivists oral history project* [sound recording], National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2000. This interview is a source for parts of this obituary, together with the archives of the Australian Society of Archivists and administrative records of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre.
 3. Baiba Berzins, 'Thoughts about the next decade', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 13, no. 2, November 1985, p. 147.
 4. John Cross quoted by Alan Ventress in, 'Support by the New South Wales Government for the Archives Authority of New South Wales 1960–98 and State Records New South Wales 1999–2012', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2013, p. 71.
 5. In his interview with Baiba, Michael mentioned that the conditions in the vault were not bad, except that the vault was occasionally flooded by toilets from the Judges' quarters above. Ewan remembers that later on, at the Archives of Business and Labour, there were also several minor floods and one case of sewerage overflow in the Tunnel. With mops, buckets, sturdy push brooms and gum boots on hand, Michael would take command, organising his staff to respond in a cool and practical manner.
 6. Michael Saclier, 'More Archives', Letter to the Editor, *The Bulletin*, vol. 104, no. 5416, 15 May 1984, pp. 12–13, in response to Tim Duncan's article about the University of Melbourne Archives, 'Recording the growth of industry', *The Bulletin*, vol. 104, no. 5403, 14 February 1984, pp. 39–43.
 7. The outline of Mike's career at ABL/NBAC is drawn in part from copies of the Archives' *Annual Reports to RSSH Faculty, 1956–2000*, held at the ANU Archives.
 8. Michael Organ recalled, 'Our visit to the nation's premier archives of business and labour at the Australian National University brought us to a cavernous and dimly lit space built as an underground car park but never used as such and containing what seemed like hundreds of rows of shelves straining under the weight of pale brown and cream archive boxes. We were enthralled. Twenty years on ... [he had] fond memories of warming to archives as a profession, and of listening intently under that low concrete ceiling in 1986 to a doyen of Australian archives, the white-haired Michael Saclier', Michael Organ, review of *Light from the Tunnel*, *Labour History*, no. 92, May 2007, pp. 183–184.
 9. Minutes of the meeting of the Faculty of the Research School of Social Sciences, 5 June 1991, RSSH Faculty Minutes and Agenda Papers, ANUA 290 Item 6, ANU Archives.
 10. *Noel Butlin Archives Centre Annual Report, 2002*, held at ANU Archives.
 11. Pat Quinn, citation for Michael Saclier in 'Honorary Memberships', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 13, no. 2, November 1985, pp. 152–153.
 12. Phyllis Mander-Jones and Allan Horton, 'Editorial', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 1, no. 1, November 1955, p. 1.
 13. HJ Gibbney and RC Sharman, 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY Notes on the 20th Anniversary of *Archives and Manuscripts*', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 6, no. 5, November 1975, pp. 192–196.
 14. Minutes of the Steering Committee, January–September 1958, ASA archives, N187/2, NBAC.
 15. GL Fischer, 'The Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia, 1951–1971', in *Library Association of Australia, Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference held in Sydney, August 1971: Progress and Poverty*, Conference Committee, Sydney, 1972, pp. 215–216.
 16. Thea Exley to Ian, 14 November 1974, in her records relating to activities of the Archives Section of the LAA and the Steering Committee appointed to investigate the formation of an Australian association of archivists: Folder 6, Papers relating to the formation of the ASA,

- 1974–1975, ASA archives, N187/13, NBAC. In 1959 a committee of the LAA Archives Section tabled a *Report on Archives and Libraries*, arguing that, since the ‘trend in Australia will be... towards the separation of archives and libraries’ and since ‘there are two separate professions’, the LAA ‘should recognise this fact... by making the examination regulations less rigid’ and adjusting its professional membership qualifications (*Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 1, no. 6, November 1959, pp. 27–33). In consequence, the LAA introduced a special syllabus in Archives Administration in conjunction with its registration examinations in 1962, and Bob Sharman was appointed to the LAA Board of Examiners, the first archivist to be so appointed, ‘Library Association of Australia: Certification of Archivists’, in ‘News Notes’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 1, no. 7, August 1960, p. 19. (See also, Peter Orlovich, ‘Some Basic Assumptions Underlying the education and Training of Archivists’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 6, n. 6, February 1976, p. 212.)
17. ‘Archives Office of Tasmania’ in ‘News Notes’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 4, no. 4, August 1972, p. 31.
 18. Sharman to Saclier, 31 October 1972, ASA archives, N187/50, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University.
 19. Saclier to Sharman, 7 November 1972, *ibid.* Gerald Fischer had begun organising meetings of an informal Sydney Archivists’ Group in 1970, *A&M*, vol. 4, no. 3, November 1970.
 20. *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, no. 4, August 1973, pp. 93–94. See also Michael Saclier, ‘The Australian Society of Archivists: the first five years’, *A&M*, vol. 8, no. 1, June 1980, pp. 3–8, and *History of ASA*, ASA web page, <<https://www.archivists.org.au/about-us/history>>, accessed 8 August 2020.
 21. ‘Miscellany’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 5, no. 4, August 1973, and vol. 5, no. 5, November 1973. Michael’s ‘Miscellany’ column continued up to the May 1975 issue of *A&M*. It was a vehicle which Michael used to mobilise archivists leading up to the Inaugural General Meeting of the ASA.
 22. Accessible on the ASA History webpage, <<https://www.archivists.org.au/about-us/history>>.
 23. Letter dated 5 May 1975, Correspondence with Libraries April–September 1975, President’s correspondence and subject files [Michael Saclier 1975–1977], N187/56, ASA archives, NBAC.
 24. ASA, Minutes of Biennial General Meeting held at Burgmann College, Canberra, 14/15 May 1977, p. 4, ASA archives, N187/15, NBAC.
 25. Baiba Berzins, ‘The Australian Council of Archives’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 20, no. 1, May 1992, p. 51.
 26. Lindsay Cleland (ASA President), untitled circular, n.d. [September 1981,] in Michael Saclier’s National Consultative Machinery file 1979–1983, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC.
 27. The other members were Don Brech (NT Archives), John Parker (National Bank of Australia), Ken Smith (Sydney University Archives), Peter Orlovich (UNSW School of Librarianship), Christine Shergold (Archives Office of NSW) and Peter Crush (City of Adelaide).
 28. Saclier to Secretary, AACOBs, 30 May 1979, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC.
 29. Chris Hurley, *National Consultative Machinery Committee Report*, attached to Agenda for the Third Biennial General Meeting of the ASA, Melbourne, 22 May 1981, p. 6, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC.
 30. At the 1981 ASA BGM Michael was also elected as Convenor of an *ad hoc* Committee on the Joint Review of Australian Archives. The ASA was concerned about the implications of the Review’s recommendations in so far as they reflected an ‘anti-professionalism attitude’ with stress on recruiting of generalist staff and ‘production through training within Australian Archives of well-rounded public servants, not professional archivists’ (Robert French, seconding the motion in *Minutes of the 3rd BGM of the ASA, Melbourne, 22 May 1981*, p. 10, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC).
 31. Hurley, p. 11.
 32. Cleland to Saclier, 7 July 1981, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC.
 33. Saclier to Cleland, 14 July 1981, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC.

34. Orlovich to Cleland, 15 July 1981, N187/951, ASA archives, NBAC.
35. *Canberra Times*, 29 November 1984, p. 8.
36. Minutes of a Meeting held at the Archives of Business and Labour, Australian National University, Canberra, on 28–29 November 1984, p. 2, N187/722, ASA archives, NBAC.
37. *Australian Society of Archivists Bulletin*, October 1986, p. 8.
38. See Michael Piggott, ‘Who speaks for us, and to whom?’, in ‘The Australian Archival system, 1971–2008: a valedictory appraisal’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 36, no. 2, November 2008, pp. 194–196.
39. Orlovich, pp. 204–225.
40. *ibid.*, pp. 206–207.
41. Michael Saclier, ‘Ten Years of the Australian Society of Archivists: In Retrospect’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 13, no. 2, November 1985, pp. 145–147.
42. *ibid.*, p. 146.
43. *ibid.*
44. Frank Bongiorno, ‘The sweetest victory of them all (and a humbling experience)’, in Barry Howarth and Ewan Maidment (eds), *Light from the Tunnel: collecting the Archives of Business and labour at the Australian National University, 1953–2003*, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Canberra, 2004, p. 125.
45. Orlovich, pp. 215–216. See Hilary Jenkinson, ‘The Duties of the Archivist’, in *A Manual of Archive Administration*, revised 2nd edition, Percy Lund, Humphries & Co, London, 1965, p. 15.
46. *ibid.*, pp. 215–216. In support, Orlovich quoted Schellenberg’s assertion that archivists ‘are the guardians of the truth, or at least, of the evidence on the basis of which truth can be established’.
47. Chris Hurley has granted permission to publish his tribute in *Archives and Manuscripts*, but he retains the copyright over it.

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