



Should the Australian Society of Archivists have a diversity policy?

Alongside the production of this issue of the journal, I have been preparing a chapter for an edited volume about the impact of World War I on the universities and professions in Australia. Absent from the volume is a chapter about the archival profession, which is understandable given the more recent history of the profession in Australia from the 1950s.¹ Nonetheless, a source of inspiration for the Beyond 1914 and Expert Nation projects,² which underpin the volume I am contributing to, is the archival activity at the University of Sydney between 1915 and 1938 of preparing a record of war service, the *Book of Remembrance*.³ Established in 1917, the Australian War Records Section collected official records and other institutions collected personal papers in the interwar period.⁴ This early phase of Australian archival activity following World War I and later professional developments are part of a wider story of professionalisation in a national context.

Professional societies and associations formed to control accreditation, increase the status of professions, speak with authority to government and the public on matters of professional expertise, promote investment in expert knowledge, and disseminate professional knowledge and practice. Profession connects us with discipline, knowledge and power. Yet in liberal democracies, it also invokes responsibility for providing reliable, democratic and trusted expertise to benefit the community as a whole. Who is authorised to hold knowledge and profess expertise shapes what is known and acted upon. The archive constructed through professional interventions tells the story of a nation primarily from white settler perspectives. The themes of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) National Conference, 'Diverse Worlds', in Melbourne, 26–27 September 2017, addressed the 'who' of the archival profession, its members, the creators, keepers and users of the records it is concerned with, and the communities it serves.

The two keynote speakers were Verne Harris, Director of Archive and Dialogue at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, and Jarrett Drake, PhD student in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University. Each concluded that the archival profession in their respective countries of South Africa and the United States of America represents the 'whiteness' of the archive rather than wider communities. Readers may reflect on Harris' keynote published in this issue and we intend to publish Drake's keynote in a future issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.⁵ Both have taken their archival expertise beyond archival institutions and professions to work with communities for justice and liberation.

Their presentations, as well as others at the conference, including Professor Lynette Russell's Jean Whyte Memorial Lecture, 'Affect in the Archive: Trauma, Grief, Delight and Texts. Some Personal Reflections', published in this issue, led conference participants to reflect once again on the whiteness of the Australian archive. Indigenous Australian archivists, researchers and community members, among others, challenge this whiteness. Presentations at the Information Technologies and Indigenous Communities (ITIC) Symposium on 27–28 September, held jointly with the ASA conference, were a counterpoint to the archival discussions. The ITIC convenors,

Professor Aaron Corn and Dr Lyndon Ormond-Parker, will edit the November 2018 issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* to publish the ITIC proceedings.

Given the critiques presented by the keynote speakers, which called for archivists to go beyond diversity, merely acting as ‘hosts’ to the guest ‘others’ in the archive – indeed to move beyond the profession towards new communities of knowledge and practice – I wondered about the implications for the ASA. Unlike the Society of American Archivists, the ASA does not have a diversity policy. Should we have one? If not, what other initiatives might lead to a more representative profession, record and service to the communities in which we work and live?

To answer some of these questions, I canvassed the conference organisers by email and received responses from Mike Jones, ASA Victoria Branch co-convenor, and committee member Michaela Hart, as well as the ASA President, Julia Mant, summarised here. The theme of the conference grew from a desire to increase the representativeness and inclusiveness of the conference and ‘to extend and challenge archivists with deliberately broader content and speakers’. The diversity theme drew on the ‘lived experience’ of participants’ relationships to archives. The ‘In Our Own Voice: Deaf/Disability Archives’ and ‘Liberating Hidden Histories’ sessions are two good examples.⁶ Joint programming with ITIC was also a deliberate move to widen the conversation.

The conference also addressed practical issues including simultaneous Auslan interpretation, the introduction of a conference Code of Conduct to make inclusiveness more explicit, and gender-neutral toilets.

The conference organisers sought a theme not merely to help select papers but to project a more inclusive approach onto future conferences and ‘at our most idealistic’ influence the profession as a whole. This is the greater challenge.

Reflecting on Jarrett Drake’s closing keynote recently with colleagues, I personally feel the ASA as a body needs to respond to the criticism of professional associations and reflect internally about what we might actually do well, and where we need to do much better in regards to diversity. (Julia Mant, ASA President)

The ASA does have a policy on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁷ However, as noted at the 2016 ASA National Conference Loris Williams panel, it is 20 years old and a straw poll at the 2016 conference indicated many members attending the conference were not aware of the policy. In 2017, the ASA Council issued a Statement of Support for the LGBTI community at the time of the marriage equality referendum,⁸ perhaps indicating ‘a broader advocacy position than many members expected’.

There is clearly much to discuss concerning diversity, inclusion and profession in the Australian archives community. I can recommend Mark Crookston’s conference review in this issue as a balanced and reflexive response to the Diverse Worlds conference. He concluded that: ‘I’m prepared to sign up to my professional association, even when it’s not in my country. The work they do to bring us together, share our experiences, challenge our practice and direct paths forward is critical work.’

I would like to thank conference keynote speakers and presenters for bringing these debates to the conference and the journal. In addition to those mentioned, you will find in this issue reflections by Sue Fairbanks on collecting (University of Melbourne) and Gianni Di Gravio and Ann Hardy (Newcastle University) on GLAM^x, an experiment with teaching and learning using archives.

More widely, I appreciate the engagement of recordkeeping professionals and communities nationally and internationally in *Archives and Manuscripts*, enabling us to bring a diverse range of peer-reviewed articles, reflections and reviews to members and readers in recent, current and future issues of the journal. In this issue, you will find peer-reviewed articles on cost models for cloud storage of records by Julie McLeod (Northumbria University, UK) and Brianna Gormly (Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA, USA). Our colleagues from Monash University in Australia have written on recordkeeping literacy (Catherine Nicholls) and the records continuum

(Viviane Frings-Hessami). Morgan Currie and Britt Paris from the universities of Stanford, USA/ Edinburgh, UK and California, Los Angeles, USA explore synergies between data activism and archival activism to promote data archiving. Cassie Findlay reports from San Francisco, USA on the most recent review of the International Standard on Records Management, ISO 15489, and ASA Western Australia Branch colleagues provide an update on advocacy for the independence of the State Records Office of Western Australia. I hope you find something of interest to you.

Endnotes

1. Aspects of this more recent history are discussed by Ewan Maidment, 'Lindsay Cleland, 1928–2017', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2018, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2018.1424641>>, and Sue Fairbanks in her reflection in this issue. Also see Michael Piggott, *Archives and Societal Provenance: Australian Essays*, Chandos Publishing, Oxford, 2012.
2. Beyond 1914: The University of Sydney and the Great War, available at <<http://beyond1914.sydney.edu.au/>>, accessed 6 June 2018. Expert Nation, available at <<http://expertonation.org/>>, accessed 6 June 2018.
3. *Book of Remembrance of the University of Sydney in the Great War 1914–1918*, Australasian Medical Publishing, Sydney, 1939.
4. Anne-Marie Condé, 'A "Gift to the Nation": The Diaries and Notebooks of CEW Bean', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2011, pp. 43–64. Also see Anne-Marie Condé, 'Capturing the Records of War: Collecting at the Mitchell Library and the Australian War Memorial', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 36, no. 125, 2005, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610508682915>>.
5. Jarrett Drake, 'Diversity's Discontents: In Search of an Archive of the Oppressed', paper presented at ASA National Conference, Melbourne, 26–27 September 2017, available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj1BwMXonc>>, accessed 11 June 2018.
6. Papers by some of the presenters in this session are available at Jean Taylor, 'Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives Inc', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2018, doi: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01576895.2017.1402356>. Also see Graham Willett and Kathy Sport, 'Homosexuality and the University of Melbourne', University of Melbourne Archives, available at <https://archives.unimelb.edu.au/resources/subject_guides/homosexuality-and-the-university-of-melbourne>, accessed 4 April 2018, and Andrew Trounson, 'When Kissing was a Crime', Pursuit, University of Melbourne, available at <<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/when-kissing-was-a-crime>>, accessed 4 July 2018.
7. Available at <<https://www.archivists.org.au/community/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders>> and <<https://www.archivists.org.au/about-us/position-papers>>, accessed 12 June 2018.
8. Available at <<https://www.archivists.org.au/news/asa-statement-of-support-for-the-lgbti-community>>, accessed 10 June 2018.

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