



Editorial

This issue presents a number of articles and reflections about some women's archives from the perspectives of some archivists, activists and researchers. It addresses some major, significant and challenging archival and research projects relating to women's archives. Most of the settings for the archives discussed in this issue could be described as 'traditional' archives among whose primary purposes is to support research.

The under-representation of women (along with most of the population) in archives has long been recognised. Despite almost fifty years of campaigning and scholarship since the second-wave feminism of the 1970s there are still far fewer women than men represented in archival collections of all kinds, especially where the reason for preservation of the records is to document their own life, career, achievements or activities from their own perspective, rather than, for example, as a client or subject of a government department, as a wife or secretary.

Among the scientists' papers of Cambridge University Library where I work there are no personal papers of women, in a cohort of about 200 scientists. Women appear nonetheless in the records in various roles. The biochemist and sinologist Joseph Needham (1900–1995) retained papers of his mother Alicia Needham (1863–1945), composer and suffragette. Work by scientific illustrator Charlotte Sowerby (1820–1865) was found among wall charts from the university's geology department.¹ Drawings and watercolours of the Royal Greenwich Observatory by Astronomer Royal George Airy's (1801–1892) wife Richarda (1804–1875) and daughter Christabel (1842–1917) have been entered into a digitisation competition – the winner goes online in the Cambridge Digital Library!² A collection of letters by naturalist Charles Darwin's women correspondents, *Darwin and Women* was published in 2017.³ Women are everywhere in the archives (including as archivists in a feminised profession),⁴ but they are nowhere. Drawing the shape of past collecting practices can evidence the need for a more proactive approach to archival collecting.

ANU University Archivist, Maggie Shapley, discusses how she applies principles of archival appraisal to identifying, transferring and collecting the records of women academics at Australia's national university. Founded almost entirely by men, women's absence from the ANU archives is perpetuated by historical inequalities in appointments. Shapley provides several examples of how she and her colleagues have started to overcome some of these barriers to including women in the university archives and the Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour. University of Melbourne archivist Katie Wood is facing similar challenges from a different perspective in the early stages of her PhD research on the history of women working in the metal trades in Australia, which draws on her experience as a reference archivist at the University of Melbourne Archives with its substantial holdings of trade union and social movement archives. Attending to literature on archival silences, Wood is using feminist scholarship on how to read the historical record for evidence of women's experience. Nikki Henningham and Helen Morgan from the University's eScholarship Research Centre report on a new project with Museum Victoria and other partners about rural women's experiences working and living on the land, starting with rural women's stories and bringing a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, archivists and journalists together to document and communicate some of those stories. Locating and finding homes for rural women's archives is one of the goals of the project.

Maryanne Dever in her introduction to a recent issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* on feminist archiving notes, 'initial feminist archival projects framed in the language of absence and recovery

have given way to more tactical engagements with the role of archives in feminist knowledge making.⁵ We acknowledge here that many archival institutions have never filled the absences or effected the recoveries to which Dever refers. The ongoing activism of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives Inc is discussed by one of the organisation's founders, Jean Taylor, along with the influence this has had on Taylor's life, activism and the writing of Australian women's history. In this reflection, which itself might be considered a 'primary source' of feminist archiving in Australia, Taylor provides a powerful perspective on what Cifor calls the 'liveliness' of archives.⁶ The intergenerational nature of archiving challenges us to examine contributions of both theory and practice. Dever following Caswell recognises the lack of interchange and discourse shared between humanists interested in archives and archivists despite the fact that 'how questions of use and value still determine what materials are made available to us as feminist researchers whether digitally or in more traditional formats,' including 'priorities concerning the acquisition, processing, conservation and digitisation of particular archival materials'.⁷ This is not merely a gap between humanities theory and archival practice. The intergenerational and intractable nature of archives are among the properties that make them hard to change to meet current requirements but also, in some respects, valuable, if by no means incontrovertible.

The intergenerational challenges of feminism – as well as some of the challenges of working with second-wave feminist archives are apparent in articles and reflections on the archives of two of Australia's well-known feminist authors, Helen Garner and Germaine Greer. Generous contributions by Bernadette Brennan, Rachel Buchan, Lachlan Glanville and Kate Hodgetts question why these archives were created and kept, how and by whom they might be accessed, used and disseminated, and how archival creators, keepers, archivists and researchers may become implicated in archival processes and ethics. Both archives to some extent pre-empt feminist activist archivist Jenna Ashton's call to 'piece together archives that represent the dull; the odd; the excluded; the awkward. Let's air some dirty laundry...'.⁸ Two reflections conclude this issue focused on the 'what' and 'how' as much as the 'who' and 'why' of women's archives. Sarah Brown considers books as archival objects in Greer's archive in an elegant and practical study of how print culture can be catalogued as feminist archives. In our only contribution from colleagues internationally in this issue, Jonathan Pledge and Eleanor Dickens discuss the stages of curating the born-digital archive of Wendy Cope, pointing optimistically yet pragmatically to the many challenges and opportunities of curating contemporary women's archives including born-digital artefacts, even as we acknowledge that we have not yet overcome or lived up to the old ones.

Endnotes

1. I thank my colleague Sian Collins for bringing these to my attention.
2. My colleague Emma Saunders made this excellent proposal.
3. Samantha Evans (ed) *Darwin and Women: a selection of letters*, Cambridge University Press, 2017.
4. A point raised by Maryanne Dever, 'Archives and new modes of feminist research', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, Nos. 91–92, pp. 1–4.
5. Dever, p. 2.
6. Marika Cifor, 'Stains and Remains: Liveliness, Materiality and the Archival Lives of Queer Bodies', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol 32, Nos. 91–92, pp. 5–21.
7. Dever, p. 2; Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' is not an Archive: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies", *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, vol. 16, No. 1.
8. Jenna Ashton, 'Feminist Archiving [a manifesto continued] Skilling for Activism and Organising', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, No. 91–92, pp. 126–149.

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