



## Collecting women's archives at the ANU Archives

Maggie Shapley

University Archivist, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

### ABSTRACT

The Australian National University Archives holds both the archives of the University and a large collection of business and labour archives in the Noel Butlin Archives Centre. Both are governed by collecting policies, and neither of these policies mention gender. The relative absence of women's voices in both collections raises the question about whether archival policies should seek to redress past silences.

### KEYWORDS

Women's archives; University archives; acquisition; appraisal; disposal

The Easter Conference of 1948 brought together academics and administrators from around Australia to plan future directions for the fledgling Australian National University (ANU), which had been established by Act of Parliament in 1946. The proceedings were led by the Academic Advisory Committee consisting of scientist Sir Howard Florey, historian Professor Keith Hancock, physicist Professor Mark Oliphant and anthropologist Professor Raymond Firth. The committee had been appointed by the University's Interim Council, which was composed of senior bureaucrats and academics including Sir Richard Mills, Professor Kenneth Bailey, Dr HC Coombs, Sir Frederic Eggleston, Sir Robert Garran, Sir David Rivett and Professor Douglas Wright. Over one hundred people attended the various meetings and seminars of the Easter Conference and they were all men. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Associate Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, was the only woman invited, but did not attend.

One of the outcomes of the conference was confirmation of the emphasis given by the Interim Council and the Academic Advisers to the importance of securing 'first-rate men'.<sup>1</sup> While this wording did not imply any discrimination against women, few women were appointed in the early years of the University and only a very small number of research scholarships were awarded to women (in 1950, one out of 19 awarded).<sup>2</sup> The first female professor, Hanna Neumann, was appointed in 1964. From the formation of the permanent Council in 1951 until 1968, there was only one woman member (Senator Dorothy Tangney, appointed by the Senate) out of the total membership of between 22 and 32 in that period.<sup>3</sup>

In 1955, the all-male Standing Committee of Council adopted a recommendation of the all-male Board of Graduate Studies that wives of members of staff or research students should not be employed without the approval of the Board or Vice-Chancellor. The Board indicated that it would not approve an appointment 'if the wife is to be in the same

department as her husband and responsible to him' or 'if the appointment is to any position which carries access to confidential files'.<sup>4</sup> There was at that time no need for the Council to adopt a position on the employment of husbands of members of staff (and whether they could be trusted with confidential files) as there were only four female Research Fellows and none were married.

When Senator Dorothy Tangney's long term on the ANU Council was due to expire in 1968, her fellow member appointed by the Senate, Senator Laught, raised the possibility of commemorating her association with the University. The Ceremonial and Naming Committee was asked by the Standing Committee to consider an appropriate way for this to be done.<sup>5</sup> The idea appears to have been dropped between then and the Committee's next meeting in November as it does not appear on any later agenda. When the Naming Committee did consider a list of 'persons associated with proposals for a university in Canberra ... and with the establishment of Canberra University College and the Australian National University',<sup>6</sup> there were over 100 men listed and one woman (Mrs P Tillyard, a member of the first Council of the Canberra University College, described as 'wife of Dr RJ Tillyard, chief entomologist, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation [CSIRO]'), but Senator Tangney's name does not appear.

Given the male-centric beginnings of the University, the scope to collect records documenting the experience of women at the University is narrow, and raises the question: if women were under-represented, should extra effort be given to tracking down and encouraging the donation of women's papers? Could this skew the collection to make it appear that the role of women was more significant than it was? An alternate view is that, given the barriers to women's participation and academic promotion, there is a greater need to preserve documentation of those women who challenged or even managed to overcome them.

The University's disposal authority distinguishes between academic staff in its retention policy – personnel files of those staff attaining Professor or equivalent status are retained permanently, while other files are disposed of at a set period after retirement. This means that the staff files of most women are sentenced for destruction. Is it the role of the archivist to redress the discrimination that female staff may have experienced which may have resulted in few being promoted to the level of Professor? Should we seek to retain the evidence of a female staff member's possibly superior experience and skill set that may have been discounted when promotions were denied? The CSIRO, as one example, has within its disposal authority a special provision to retain the staff files of early women scientists, and a similar approach was taken by Dr Sigrid McCausland, University Archivist from 1998 to 2005, by rescuing many early women academics' files from an over-zealous application of the disposal authority.

The late establishment of the University Archives, more than 50 years after the establishment of the University, also meant that the papers of some ANU women academics, which might have been sought by the University Archives, had already been deposited in other institutions such as the National Library of Australia and the Australian Academy of Science.<sup>7</sup> In regard to academics' own research and teaching papers, the University Archives' collecting policy relies on concepts such as assessment of an academic's 'contribution to scholarship and to the university community' and the 'significance of their research'.<sup>8</sup> One's own biases influence both appraisal and collecting decisions: what is assessed as significant to a feminist archivist with an Arts degree in literature is very likely to differ from the assessment of another archivist with different qualifications and experience. At the simplest

level, the question could be framed: when faced with a list of people's names, which names are familiar to me because of my own interests?

Early acquisitions for the University Archives were the records of the Women's Studies Program (established in 1976 and formally abolished in 2000), including those of convener Professor Jill Julius Matthews, the records of the University's first Equal Employment Opportunity Consultant, Dr Marian Sawyer, from the 1980s, and the teaching papers of Dr Ethel Tory, Senior Lecturer in French. An important way of encouraging similar acquisitions is to document all acquisitions in an online database so that their existence in the Archives (whether processed or not) is advertised. Looking to see where other people have deposited their archives is often the first step for a retiring academic (or their family) looking for a permanent home for their records.

As is usual for a University Archives, papers of academics only become available once they are of no further use to their creator, so there is often a significant delay in their donation to the Archives. It is not uncommon for elderly ANU academics to offer their papers as they relinquish their offices, 20 or 30 years after they have retired. Many other academics take their records home on their retirement and these are often only offered after their death. This time delay, in combination with the small number of early female academics, means that direct approaches to individuals and their families are possible even many years after their academic career and can result in the donation of papers. An example of this was the recent acquisition of English and Drama lectures delivered by Lady Hope Hewitt, who first taught at the Canberra University College in 1948 and retired from ANU in 1981, in response to the Archives' direct approach to the family after her death in 2011. Other recent acquisitions have been the papers of feminist environmentalist and philosopher Dr Val Plumwood, ethnomusicologist Coralie Rockwell and ANU Pro-Chancellor Pauline Griffin.

Another strategy to encourage donation of papers by female academics is to simply promote that women were both early graduates and staff members, and to highlight the existence of women's archives in the University Archives. An exhibition entitled 'Certain Women at the ANU' was presented in 2013 to celebrate the achievements of women at the University, featuring 'a Deputy Vice-Chancellor, a Pro-Chancellor, Professors, Research Fellows, Council members and the first women awarded Doctor of Philosophy degrees.'<sup>9</sup> It also included records of the Women's Studies Program, contrasted with those of the ANU Club for Women and the University House Ladies' Drawing Room, primarily social organisations. Research undertaken for the exhibition was used to prepare entries for the Australian Women's Register and support the Australian Women's Archives Project's online exhibition 'From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher – A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra'.<sup>10</sup>

The research for the exhibition also alerted Archives staff to the names of the 'pioneering' women so that they were aware of whose papers might be important to collect to document the role of women at the University. Shortly after the publication of an entry about micro-analyst Dr Joyce Fildes on the Australian Women's Register, her family offered her papers to the Archives. One of the first women appointed to the University as a Research Fellow, she had retained a deposit book where the bank had recorded her occupation as 'spinster chemist at University'.<sup>11</sup>

The establishment of the Pacific Research Archives in 2007 as part of the University Archives has proved to be the greatest impetus for the donation of women's academic papers to the Archives. While the promotion of the collecting program to retiring members

of staff did not specifically target female academics, the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, where our promotional efforts were concentrated, had included many female academics. As a result, papers offered to the Archives included those of anthropologists Dr Marie Reay and Professor Maev O'Collins, demographers Dr Norma McArthur and Dr Heather Booth, archivist and historian Dorothy Crozier, linguist Dr Sue Holzknacht, geographers Professor Diana Howlett and Dr Marion Ward, and historians Dr Ethel Drus, Dorothy Shineberg and Dr Bronwen Douglas.

The collecting policy for business and labour archives in the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, similar to that for the University Archives, does not refer to gender.<sup>12</sup> Under the collecting policy, only the records of 'nationally significant businesses' are collected so there is a hidden discrimination against the collecting of women's business papers given the level of participation of women in those businesses. With trade union records, the collecting of women's archives reflects the stronger participation of women within trade unions: as Australian Council of Trade Unions officials and union representatives, especially in female-dominated trade unions such as those for teachers, nurses, textile workers, child-care workers and sex workers. Women's industrial issues such as equal pay, the Commonwealth marriage bar, the exploitation of piece-workers, maternity leave and workplace sexual harassment are the subject of many trade unions' files.

These are supplemented by personal papers such as those of Mary Wright (a founder of the Council of Action for Equal Pay in 1937), Della Elliott (Secretary of the Trade Union Equal Pay Committee from 1946 and long-term administrator of the Seamen's Union of Australia) and Dr Kathleen Rachel Makinson of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation Officers' Association in their efforts for gender equity, as well as the papers of Edna Ryan and Sylvia Winters on the effect of enterprise bargaining on women, Amirah Inglis's research papers on the Spanish Civil War, sociologist Professor Jean Martin's papers and Professor Marian Sawyer's research papers in relation to the Commonwealth marriage bar. The collecting policy also references 'nationally significant professional associations and industry bodies' which are 'active and influential in social and political arenas', which allows the Archives to collect the records of peak women's organisations such as the Australian Federation of Medical Women, the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women, and the Union of Australian Women.

There remain gaps in the collecting of women's archives at the ANU Archives, both in the Noel Butlin Archives Centre and the University Archives. Those that exist in the University's own archives can be more easily addressed, through promotion of existing holdings, staff awareness and direct approaches. Unfortunately there are as yet no papers of a female Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor, but then no women have ever been appointed to these positions.

## Endnotes

1. Jill Waterhouse, 'Early Days of the Australian National University: The Easter Conference, 1948', p. 32, 2017, available at <http://archives.anu.edu.au/exhibitions/easter-conference-april-1948>, accessed 19 October 2017.
2. *ANU News*, no. 1, March 1950, p. 4 and no. 2, April 1950, p. 5.
3. Three women were elected in 1969: Dr Marie Reay, Ruth Arndt and Dr Germaine Joplin.
4. ANU Archives: ANUA 199-4, Standing Committee minutes of meetings, 15 August 1955.
5. ANU Archives: ANUA 199-8, Standing Committee minutes of meetings, 5 April 1968.

6. ANU Archives: ANUA 188-2, Ceremonial and Naming Committee minutes of meetings, 14 August 1970. The Canberra University College was a predecessor of the ANU dating from 1930.
7. For instance, those of Dr Thelma Hunter and Professor Hanna Neumann.
8. Australian National University, 'ANU Archives Collecting Procedure', 2016, available at <[https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP\\_009413](https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_009413)>, accessed 19 October 2017.
9. ANU Archives, 'Certain Women at ANU', 2013, online version available at <<http://archives.anu.edu.au/exhibitions/certain-women>>, accessed 19 October 2017.
10. Australian Women's Archives Project, 'From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra', 2013, available at <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg/>>, accessed 19 October 2017.
11. ANU Archives: ANUA 609-37, Joyce Fildes papers – bank book, 1946–50. There is a digital copy linked to the database entry at <<http://archivescollection.anu.edu.au/index.php/miscellaneous-personal-correspondence-photographs-and-bank-book>>, accessed 19 October 2017.
12. Australian National University, 'Noel Butlin Archives Centre Collecting Procedure', 2016, available at <[https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP\\_009408](https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_009408)>, accessed 19 October 2017.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

*Maggie Shapley* is the University Archivist at the Australian National University with responsibility for the University Archives, the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, the Pacific Research Archives and University Records. She previously worked at the National Archives of Australia and at the World Bank Archives in Washington, DC. She was a member of the Working Group on Access which developed the International Council on Archives' Principles of Access to Archives (2012), and is currently a member of the Management Committees of the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register and the Australian Women's Archives Project.