

OBITUARY

Dagmar Parer, 24 February 1948 – 4 November 2014



Members of the archives profession will have been saddened to hear of the loss of Dagmar Parer from our number late last year from mesothelioma. Dagmar made significant contributions to the work of archives, libraries and information services during a career spanning several decades across various locations in Australia.

Born in February 1948 into a German family which later immigrated to Australia, Dagmar grew up and was educated in the Canberra region, taking a BSc at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1969. Before and after her initial tertiary studies in science, Dagmar worked at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and later at the ANU, and retained a keen and active interest in botanical and environmental sciences throughout her life. However, the joys of motherhood also brought to her the realisation that she could not hope to pursue a career in science without a PhD and, as that was not then feasible, she switched fields to library and information sciences, taking graduate diplomas at the then Canberra College of Advanced Education. From 1982 to 1986 she was Lecturer in Information Retrieval in the librarianship course at the College. In this role she established the foundations for her later significant contributions in metadata and information services in the Australian Government.

After three years of responsibility for a range of library, records management and information services in an agency of the federal Attorney General's department, Dagmar moved in 1989 to the then Australian Archives (later known as the National Archives of Australia) Central Office as Director of Policy and Development. From 1992 to 1994 she held the position of Director of Electronic Records, in which position she not only played a leading role in the development of the Australian Archives' policies for electronic records but also had prime responsibility for organising the Playing for Keeps conference in Canberra in 1994. This was the first major international conference devoted to the issues of ensuring archival management of electronic records. This conference proved both seminal and controversial in the archives profession, not least because of the Australian Archives' proposals for non-custodial management of

electronic records as archives. The success of the conference was attributable directly not only to Dagmar's organisational skills but also to her determination to see its proceedings made available in the professional literature and to ensure that its proposals were followed up with practical implementation measures.

Dagmar continued to hold various Director positions at the National Archives of Australia (NAA) until early in 2000. In these roles she continued her established involvement in metadata issues across the Australian Government and led several significant inter-departmental working groups and committees. To this work Dagmar brought her focus on practical results and productive outputs, resulting in a number of publications and models for both records management in the federal government and for the management of metadata across federal government agencies. The later 1990s was a period when, with the burgeoning of the Internet, which had been scarcely perceived as a dominant issue at the 1994 conference, issues of information retrieval, standardisation of information management practices and the centrality of metadata to retrieval were dominant topics. In all of these debates and discussions Dagmar was an active participant and original contributor.

The significance of Dagmar's contributions to the emergent Australian and international discourse on electronic records, at a time when Australia came to be recognised as a world leader in innovative thinking and practice, cannot be underestimated. She represented the NAA on the electronic data management sub-committee of the Australian Government's Information Exchange Steering Committee. This sub-committee produced the still-influential 1993 report *Management of Electronic Information in the Australian Public Service*. Subsequently, she chaired the Technical Working Group of the Information Management Steering Committee (IMSC), which developed a range of prescient and influential recommendations about electronic recordkeeping in government and the need for government metadata standards for online resource discovery and recordkeeping.

Although the IMSC's report was somewhat buried as a result of wider bureaucratic and political upheavals, Dagmar's persistence and vision and her ability to charm and energise key stakeholders ensured that most of her Technical Working Group's recommendations were implemented. She chaired the Australian Government Locator Service Metadata working group and ensured that this work became both cross-jurisdictional in nature and also national in character through linkages with Standards Australia. Work on developing AGIFT – the Australian Governments Interactive Functions Thesaurus – commenced at the National Archives of Australia in 1997–1998 under her leadership and through the energies of colleague Marian Hoy. Her innovations inspired much interest from colleagues in North America as diverse as John McDonald and Terry Cook in Canada, and David Bearman and Margaret Hedstrom in the USA.

In addition to her work within government, from 1995 to 1998 Dagmar chaired the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA)/Australian Council of Archives (ACA) committee on Descriptive Standards and served on the International Council of Archives (ICA) committee on Descriptive Standards from 1996 to 1998. Members will be aware of the significant contribution the Australian profession made in this period to what became the international standards, General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD (G)) and International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families (ISAAR(CPF)). Her foundational work with the ASA/ACA committee later culminated in the publication of the ASA's guide to implementing the Australian Series System – Australia's equivalent to a national standard for archival description. Dagmar also served as Treasurer for the Pacific Regional Branch of the

ICA (PARBICA) and organised its 1994 biennial meeting in Guam. She served on the board of the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau at ANU from late 1992 to mid-1994.

In 2000, after a period as a consultant to a range of federal agencies, Dagmar took up a position in the library at James Cook University in north Queensland. On her return to Canberra, with her husband Eric Wainwright, in 2005, Dagmar resumed her consultancy career, undertaking a number of assignments for the NAA and the Collections Council of Australia. Many members will remember Dagmar's special contributions to their own development through her role as Director of Studies at a number of the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities five-day residential training programmes for younger and mid-career Australian archivists. Dagmar's professional contributions remained focused on issues arising from the contemporary digital environment and she remained an enthusiastic contributor to and follower of innovations in this field.

Throughout all of her professional work, Dagmar's contributions were marked by an openness to new ideas, a sound grasp of established knowledge in the field and a strong focus on ensuring that practical results flowed from wide-ranging discussion. Those colleagues who worked closely with her will also remember her capacity for enthusiasm and hard work, her sense of humour and *joie de vivre*, and her preference to see opportunities rather than problems. It is fitting that as a profession we acknowledge Dagmar's contributions to our field.

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