

## Editorial

Sadly, the Australian archival profession lost two respected leaders last year. Sue Newman – who made a huge contribution to relations between New South Wales’ (NSW) Aboriginal community and its state archives – died on 22 October 2012. An obituary written by Kirsten Thorpe, Sue’s colleague at State Records New South Wales and collaborator on the wonderful *In Living Memory* exhibition, celebrates the life and career of a dedicated community archivist within the opening pages of this issue. Marian Hoy passed away one week later on 29 October 2012. An obituary for Marian is currently being prepared and will appear in the next issue of *Archives & Manuscripts* in July 2013.

Mention WikiLeaks to recordkeepers and archivists and you’ll probably get some polarised views. To those who see their task as being primarily to manage and control the records of their government or corporate employer, WikiLeaks can seem like an anarchic and criminal force intent on subverting their whole purpose for being. But for those who think governments and other organisations are unnecessarily secretive about their records, what is uppermost in their minds is that powerful institutions prefer restricting access to the evidence that their records carry for decades and beyond under outdated and unwieldy access regimes. Does the fault lie with the powerful and their lack of willingness to live up to the enthusiasm for transparency and accountability that many of them profess, but few actually match with deeds? Or does it lie with archives and recordkeeping professionals, who declaim the importance of records as evidence and cite their centrality in upholding accountability, but then do little to take effective action on this front as part of their professional practice? Have they proven themselves up to fulfilling this supposedly core objective of their profession, along with the more lofty aspirations of the Records Continuum Model? Do we all knowingly accept the proposition that access under existing archives legislation will never enable access to serious information that could be incriminating for those making access decisions? If so, as Cassie Findlay argues in her article in this issue, ‘then surely the stated aims of open government can never be truly fulfilled, and access will be more about managing spin and public relations, than real accountability’.

Instead of this parlous state of affairs, camouflaged by turning records into historical curios that are trotted out on slow news days, Findlay proposes that government records in particular should be at the heart of the political processes of accountability and transparency. Within an understanding informed by the Records Continuum Model, records of politics and power, of decision-making which affects whole populations, should be pluralised much sooner and more broadly than current access regimes permit. Government archives and archivists have long shied away from the political dimension of their holdings, as if they could somehow adopt a neutral position on materials which are inherently political in nature. Many of us prefer to keep our distance from the messiness of politics and the risks to career and funding that are either overtly or implicitly threatened by transgressing the fiction of neutrality. The other major conclusion of Findlay’s paper is that archivists need to reach out to other spheres of human endeavour –namely,

to the social and political movements that are arising in the shape of the Occupy phenomenon and the Arab Spring.

In contrast to Findlay's proposals for greater openness and transformation in archival jurisdictions where Freedom of Information (FOI) has been implemented and found wanting, James Lowry reports on the findings of the International Records Management Trust research project, *Aligning Records Management with ICT/e-Government and Freedom of Information in East Africa*. Lowry argues that e-government and FOI initiatives over five East African Community (EAC) countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi) have been undermined by a lack of improvement in their recordkeeping systems. The focus of the article is on the recordkeeping regimes of three of the countries under study – Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. What is the point of developing an FOI system if the records that are being accessed in this way are flawed, thereby eroding confidence in the governance of the countries in question? This problem is especially acute when it comes to the disposition of digital records and recordkeepers beset by the fast-moving technological changes taking place in hardware and software systems. Lowry proposes that Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania need to do more work before they can do justice to a functional FOI system.

Two articles in the current issue seek to expand the domain of archival thinking by applying its lessons and resources to kindred areas of endeavour. Jessie Lynn has applied the notion of archival genres, which she traces from Kate Eichhorn, to look at the way in which the producers of zine anthologies constitute a variation on archival practice – one that would be fruitful for archivists to engage, and form a dialogue, with. Julia Cianci applies Records Continuum thinking to the management of chemical compound libraries, suggesting that scientists and technicians working in this field could benefit from the application of contemporary archival practice.

Mark Brogan and Martin Masek provide an update on the *AE2* project. An earlier article, 'AE2 Commander: simulation and serious games in the online cultural heritage space', which appeared in *Archives & Manuscripts* in May 2011, introduced the simulation of the AE2 Commander submarine and the concept of serious gaming as a way of interpreting cultural heritage in an online environment. In the current article, 'E-learning with docugames: AE2 Commander', Brogan and Masek shift their focus to analysing the learning strategies employed in their docugame and the efficacy of education through serious games incorporating documentary collections. This is a novel area of interdisciplinary investigation, which others in the heritage sector are currently also exploring. Docugames are of particular interest to cultural heritage practitioners, because unlike other serious games with historical simulations, these actually embed cultural heritage items within the gameplay, thus constituting an exciting new avenue for employing digitised collections to engage new and existing audiences.

In this issue's Reflection section, Alan Ventress gives us a frank revelation regarding what it means to run a state archives in this time of austerity, continuous improvement and efficiency dividends. Ventress' experience as the Director of State Records New South Wales (SRNSW) does seem to suggest that it has now become unrealistic to ask governments to adequately fund public bodies, such as state or federal archives. Although the situation at SRNSW is no doubt more acute than elsewhere, it does seem that the new normal in such institutions involves everyone making do with less and taking on a few more tasks on top of everything else, without asking for more resources in order to do so. Is it pointless to argue that the logic of this small government ideology that currently prevails within public administration makes no sense? Whether by intent

or accident the outcome of the relentless cuts to funding is that archives risk failing to fulfil their own mandates.

The only way this *might* make sense is if you subscribe to the orthodoxy that constant cutbacks actually make for more efficient and resourceful (and therefore better) behaviour in organisations. Forcing archival organisations into engaging in entrepreneurial behaviour and the economic equivalent of a survival-of-the-fittest attitude seems to be a hazardous way to run an essentially conservative business like archives. Can archives managers and their staff behave like entrepreneurs without fundamentally undermining their mission and the integrity of their profession? Can statutory responsibilities be put aside in the quest for further efficiency dividends? This sounds absurd, but, unfortunately, it is the fate that has befallen State Records New South Wales; other government archives around Australia are probably not too far behind. Is it time to radically rethink the way that government archives are organised in such a way that they are no longer dependant on future funding increases from government in order to tackle the many outstanding issues that confront them? Perhaps part of the answer to the dilemmas outlined by Ventress can be seen in Cassie Findlay's article, which opens this issue of the journal. In her conclusion, Findlay urges archivists to fundamentally rethink their archival methods, such that funding for large centralised archival facilities (whether physical or digital) is no longer a focus for their advocacy.

Finally, in our batch of reviews this issue, Michael Piggott teases out the lessons to be drawn for archives from *The Office: A Hardworking History* – the latest offering from the prolific Gideon Haigh. Ostensibly a book about the spaces and culture of bureaucracy and management, Piggott suggests the relevance of such a book to archivists consists in the possibility of learning the deeper context in which the documents forming our archives were created.

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