

Editorial

Variety is the keyword for this issue. Each of the papers discusses a different topic of interest to archivists, and yet there are scores of other topics that may engage attention but are not included here. I well remember the visit I paid to an elderly former missionary who had retired in England, to solicit any manuscripts or photographs she may have retained from her time in Papua. We hit it off exceedingly well and later became firm friends, but she could not see why I considered her papers important. After I had left, she wrote to me saying she had looked up the word "archivist" in the dictionary and found it meant "a keeper of old records". "Why had someone like me chosen such a 'dull' profession?"

We of course know the profession is not dull but full of variety. There is variety in the kinds of institution we serve: those major repositories, the Australian Archives and the various State Archives; the national and state historical collections; university archives, business archives, church archives, school archives, a growing number of local government archives and other bodies. Archivists not only relate to those repositories, but to the organisations which create them as well.

There is variety in the kind of things we do in our institutions and variety in the people we serve, both our employers and the public who clamour to use what we hold. The greatest variety of all is in the range of information the public believe we can or should supply.

The Australian Society of Archivists not only has a variety of interest groups, but also has variety in its Regional Branches. While each may have a similar composition of archivists from national, state and local institutions, the mix varies, and furthermore, the history of the creation of the records which become archives in each region, is quite different because all are virtually unique. Certainly some records may be of interest to more than one region or be sought at both state and national level, but generally they reflect the local interest.

When this Society was founded in 1975, all this was recognised, especially the real and practical problem of the variations in the size of the regional branches. The more isolated regions have smaller branches and consequently fewer personnel to take part in the Society's activities. Their isolation may sometimes make them feel the larger regions are ignoring them or do not appreciate what they have to offer. The larger branches also have problems. Special interest groups have a tendency to develop, and the objects of the Society will be defeated if all varieties of interest cannot be

accommodated. All the burden of the national administrative machinery has also had to be borne by the three strongest regions. Now, seven years later and half way through a second cycle of the executive's confinement to these regions, perhaps we need to have another hard look at the nationwide structure of our Society.

Whatever the structure, this journal is, and will remain, the mirror of the Society's activities and the expression of the thoughts of the people who make up the Society. Ideas and activities will vary in north, south, east and west, vary according to institution, and vary according to local interest. To cater for all this variety and to act as a unifying force for the Society is the purpose of this journal.