

and wide-ranging information about the archival riches for Australian studies lying unused in Canberra—unused, but thanks to work he was now in charge of, more and more accessible. With no sense of frustration he worked hard at clearing ground for other scholars to work. In person as in print, he was a marvellous aid to other scholars. One colleague remembers him as “my walking resource”. Jim would ask “What are you working on?”, and spoken and written hints would begin to flow. *Literally* a walking resource: how many of those thoughts about other people’s work must have come to him as he stepped it out each day between O’Connor and Acton? By the time Jim wrote his own books he had all the equipment for the job, and he used his own and other people’s aids with zest. If you pick up the booklet put out by the ANU Archives of Business and Labour you see a picture captioned “Using the descriptive finding aids”. The user is Jim Gibbney, and the photograph wasn’t staged: he just happened to be there at that time, as at many others.

Penny Fisher

Penelope Anne Kininmonth, better known to us as Penny Fisher, died on Tuesday, 31 January 1989. She was 35.

Andrew Lemon writes:

“Anyone who has worked with archives knows that death is often arbitrary and unfair. So it has been with Penny Fisher, a woman full of life, with much, much more that she would have given to her profession had the time been given to her. The contribution she had already made was remarkable, characterised by that quality of vitality. Archives to her was a live profession.”

Penny’s vitality was indeed her most striking quality. A vibrant and gutsy woman she brought to her profession those qualities that enriched all aspects of her life. Penny reached out to other people and touched their lives with her bright, unquenchable spirit. Colleagues readily recall her inimitable style and charm, her unfailing and at times zany sense of humour, and the great pleasure of her company. Life for Penny was an adventure and to know her was to become part of the fun.

Although most of us have known Penny as a city person, she grew up in the Western District and boarded at the Hermitage in Geelong before enrolling at Monash University from where she graduated in Economics and Politics in 1974. She continued to have strong ties with her family’s rural community and was fiercely loyal to the local footy team. Frank Upward’s special memory of Penny is of the annual trek to Geelong of a group of Tiger supporters led by the late Roger Joyce to meet the Cats’ contingent headed by Penny in the outer at Kardinia Park for the Geelong vs Richmond clash.



Livia Iacovino, Margaret Jennings, Penny Fisher and Judith Ellis at the Perth Conference, April 1987.

Joining Australian Archives Victoria in 1974, Penny came under the tutelage of Margaret Jennings, Anne Green, Livia Iacovino and Allan Skerman, that doyen of records managers. Livia recalls interviewing Penny “fresh from university with all the exuberance of youth when embarking on a career”. A willing pupil, Penny learnt her craft well and never lost that early enthusiasm. In 1978 she succeeded Margaret Jennings as officer in charge of the Survey and Disposal Section.

They were pioneering days at the Victorian branch, an archival wonderland where nothing was as it seemed. Professional issues were hotly debated in an environment that was at once stimulating and daunting. On one occasion Penny was so engrossed in pursuing some finer point that she abandoned two colleagues in a carpark. On her return over an hour later in her beloved Toyota, “Connie”, there were no recriminations; there never could be with Penny. The incident became celebrated in an Allan Skerman poem, “Penny’s Bummer”.

Michael Tinsley and Frank Upward pay tribute to her lasting contribution:

“Penny played a major role in the conversion of the holdings of the Victorian office to the Commonwealth Record Series system. She was involved in developing solutions for particular problems that have come to be incorporated into the system itself in areas such as simplifying documentation of temporary material, reducing duplication of

documentation processes, and improving disposal procedures for records in custody. Archivists from the Victorian and Tasmania offices at the time will recall one of her visits to Tasmania which was of epic proportions, both in helping to reduce a substantial disposal backlog and setting archival standards for the amount of clothing required to work in Tasmania repositories in July.

Penny's skill as an archivist will remain in the documentation of immigration records, Navy Office records, ABC records and many others held by the Victorian Branch. Less obvious from the official files will be her negotiating skills which enabled the records to arrive in the first place, her persistency, and eye for the main chance in convincing the relevant agency that an important collection of records would be best located at Australian Archives."

Penny's tenacity and capacity for applying archival principles in pioneering circumstances are also well remembered by Livia Iacovino in the microfilming of the Essington-Lewis papers.

Penny had not long begun her archival career when the Australian Society of Archivists was founded in 1975. A foundation member, she was present for its formation in Canberra and played a significant role in establishing the Melbourne Branch, serving as its Secretary in 1979 and Convenor in 1980.

"Curiously", writes Andrew Lemon, "her own professional development mirrored that of the Australian Society of Archivists; more than that each fostered the other". Undoubtedly the high point of her involvement with the Society was the 1981 Melbourne Conference. The theme of this conference, Archivists and Users, was dear to Penny's heart encapsulating her twin concerns of maintaining professional standards while catering for the needs of users in a practical and effective way.

Colin Smith was one of a host of speakers at the Conference:

"The first I ever heard of Penny Fisher was when she was involved in organising the 1981 conference in Melbourne. I presented a paper at that conference, and lined up a C.S.I.R.O. researcher to give another. I remember Penny ringing me a few weeks before the event and pointing out that—while this contributory activity was all very well—it was still necessary to register! (A formality I had quite overlooked).

That was a great conference. And at the centre of it all was the vivacious, enthusiastic and beautiful Ms Fisher—introducing no less a luminary than former Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck."

Andrew Lemon was Penny's co-convenor:

"The conference was a highlight in so many ways. Its aim was ambitious—to promote a better awareness amongst archivists and the users of archives, of the wealth, the treasures in Australia's archives, and

to explore the difficulties and challenges of caring for those records. Its method was ambitious too, involving nearly fifty speakers covering an immense range of expertise. As if this were not enough, the conference committee also organised the major exhibition, 'Images of Yesterday', at Myer Melbourne, which I believe remains the only occasion where Australian archival institutions have co-operated in any substantial way to provide a public display of their finest holdings. Two significant publications resulted, the first a detailed catalogue of the exhibition, and the second an edited collection of the conference papers. While this was all a magnificent team effort which provoked many Melbourne members of the Australian Society of Archivists to doubt their sanity, Penny played the co-ordinating role. She confronted and smoothed over all difficulties and ultimately produced a thoroughly admirable conference and exhibition. It was a turning point for the Society.

It was also a lot of fun. Penny brought a zest and sense of humour, a sense of the wry and the absurd to our meetings. They masked the high seriousness with which she regarded all her work. She was a passionate person prepared to take on seemingly unwinnable causes. She had the tenacity to make some of them winnable after all."

By 1984 spirits at the Melbourne Branch of the Australian Society of Archivists were flagging and finances were running low. Lindy Saul and Penny decided to take things in hand. Car rallies and wine bottlings were part of Penny's prodigious experience and these were quickly settled upon as major prospective revenue earners. Lindy recalls the nights spent plotting ways to separate Branch members from their hard earned money, the frenzied days of preparation and organisation, the frustration at great ideas come to nought, the bringing together of people for good times as well as pragmatic ends, the wonderful element of hilarity Penny's bizarre clues injected into the car rally and the joy the winebottling at Penny's home brought to Melbourne Branch tippers.

Meanwhile in 1981 Penny had succeeded Doug Bishop as Monash University Records Officer and Archivist. In the Monash Reporter in March 1989, Penny's contribution is recorded by Ann Mitchell:

"Always charming and astute, she worked hard to improve conditions for her staff and raise the status of her department. She solved a most pressing short-term storage difficulty while at the same time reviewing the whole of the administrative correspondence series. Amongst other things, Penny played a leading role in developing university procedures relating to the implementation of Freedom of Information legislation after 1982.

In the firmament of records administration specialists working in Australia tertiary educational institutions, Penny Fisher was a star."

J.D. Butchart was Registrar during Penny's years at Monash:

"In a young institution, a short contribution can be more important than it might be in an older institution. Penny Fisher's contribution to Monash in the area of her responsibility, although sadly truncated, was significant and will be enduring."

In 1986 Penny joined Judith Ellis' group Archival Systems Consultants. They had worked together before for about six years at Australian Archives, and now teamed up again.

Judith has many "Penny stories" from this time—watching from the roof of a grain shipping terminal as a ship was loaded with tons of golden grain and set sail for China, being nonplussed by overzealous security officers, tackling an old house full of sadly neglected records with a team of eager apprentice archivists, a mad midnight dash to deliver a report with minutes to spare, and Penny herself, always prepared to try something new, devise solutions and meet people and deadlines with a smile, energetic, optimistic, inspirational.

In 1985 Penny's toughest battle—with cancer—began. In Hugh Kininmonth she had found a partner to share her life and from him she drew enormous strength. They formed a wonderful partnership. Penny continued her work with Judith and kept in touch with the archival world right up to the time of her final illness. Her special qualities were heightened during this courageous and protracted time. Penny was buried in a hilltop cemetery at Mount Duneed near Geelong surrounded by the countryside that she loved. She will be remembered wherever archivists gather together. A talented and dedicated colleague and dear friend, Penny Fisher lives in our esteem and our hearts.

Note: The Penny Fisher Memorial Prize

The Penny Fisher Memorial Prize has been established and will be awarded annually to an outstanding graduate of the Monash University Master in Archives course. Donations to the Prize fund can be sent to Monash University, Clayton, Victoria 3168. Cheques should be made payable to the Penny Fisher Memorial Prize and amounts over \$2 are tax deductible. The fund was established with foundation grants from this Society, its Melbourne Branch and Monash University.