NATIONAL DATABASE COOPERATION: A CASE STUDY

Marian Hoy and Lorraine Macknight

This article covers the development and implementation of a four year project to incorporate series and item level information about the Official Records Collection of the Australian War Memorial into two of the Australian Archives' databases, the Records Information Service (RINSE) and the Australian National Guide to Archival Material Part II (ANGAM II). Areas covered include the historical development, the resources required by both institutions, issues that have had an impact on the progress and success of the project and the benefits gained for the institutions and their users.

Introduction

The story of achieving wider accessibility to the Australian War Memorial's Official Records Collection, through the Australian Archives' databases, the Records Information Service (RINSE) and Australian National Guide to Archival Material Part II (ANGAM II), reflects in practical terms the differences between archival documentation and control at series and item levels. It is possible, and usually necessary, to pursue the respective levels at a different pace, using different resources, and often in a different context.

For the Australian War Memorial, timing, staff changes (including a major establishment reorganisation), and different data entry arrangements, are underlying reasons why the contributions to RINSE and ANGAM II were conducted as two distinct projects. Within the Australian Archives, the projects have been the responsibility of two quite separate sections, Records Information Management and Access. This article therefore pursues the streams independently as a matter of convenience, although a similarity of approach aims to give general cohesion.

RINSE is the Australian Archives database of information about the structure and history of government and about the records created by

Commonwealth and related institutions. The purpose of RINSE is to provide the framework for the records information systems of the Archives, the Commonwealth Record Series (CRS) system and its predecessors.

RINSE is currently not directly available to the public. However, information is produced from RINSE for public reference as microfiche (ANGAM I), and consists of indexes, inventories and registrations of Commonwealth agencies, series and persons, in agency, Archives and Memorial custody.

An article about RINSE appeared in *Archives and Manuscripts* (Vol. 17, No. 1, May 1989). It covered the historical development of the auto-mated database, and its retrieval and data entry capabilities.

ANGAM II is an item level database which contains details of almost 600,000 records held by the Archives and the Memorial which have been examined for public access under the provisions of the Archives Act 1983. Details of the records on the database include series and item number, title, access decision and location. There are a range of search options including keyword in title, date range and location. The database is available online to users in the Archives Regional Offices and in the Memorial.[1]

RINSE

History

The process of incorporating series information about the Memorial's Official Records Collection into the finding aids of the Australian Archives formally commenced in 1986. A Control Systems Working Group was established with representatives from the Memorial and the Archives and operated under the auspices of a Joint Policy Steering Group, whose aim was to oversee a range of records-related issues affecting both institutions. The Control Systems Working Group first met in April 1986 and its last formal meeting was held in March 1987.

The main recommendations of the working group were to develop ANGAM III as a finding aid for records of another custodial institution holding Commonwealth records, and to include in the finding aid Commonwealth and the other official records identified as part of the Memorial Collection.

Initially, a compatible AWM series registration form was designed inhouse to help standardise series information for a system of manual finding aids in the Memorial's Research Centre as well as provide summary information for entry onto RINSE. AWM series numbers had been allocated only since 1983 and, when data entry first began, totalled fewer than 220. By August 1987 some 30 registrations for ANGAM III had been drafted.

The project's fortunes waned somewhat in early 1988, at which time the Official Records subsection was part of a major staffing and functional reorganisation of the Memorial's Research Centre.[2] In September that year, in the interests of stylistic standardisation, several AWM series titles were revised. Individual ANGAM III registrations subsequently prepared were based on final rather than provisional series description work. By February 1989, 130 series (57%) had been entered, including a number of revised 1987 entries. Those outstanding at the beginning of 1990 have been given provisional description against mandatory entry fields to ensure the retention of previously allocated AWM series numbers in RINSE.[3]

The separate microfiche report of AWM registrations in ANGAM III was discontinued in 1990 (see below). All the information relating to AWM agencies, persons and series is now produced as part of the ANGAM I microfiche. This ensures better integration of the information, and eases some of the complexities of RINSE and ANGAM.

Resources
The addition of AWM series to RINSE has, on the whole, been considered a special project within the Official Records subsection of the Memorial and dependant on available curatorial staff to prepare entries. The direction and more fluctuating circumstances of the AWM series project (compared with additions to ANGAM II) have therefore been considerably affected by staff changes and competing operational priorities within the subsection.

Australian Archives staff commenced entering the summary registration information onto RINSE in mid 1988. The information had to be checked to ensure it met the validation requirements for RINSE and was compatible with the provenance framework of the CRS system. Because checking and subsequent data entry was not a straightforward process, experienced Archives staff, rather than contract keying personnel, undertook the work. Once the information had been entered and updated, Archives staff sent printouts of the new or amended registrations to the Memorial. Entry of series by Archives staff continued through 1989, including new registrations and more detailed revisions of series already on RINSE.

The first fiche edition of ANGAM III was issued in December 1988 and consisted of two fiche, a listing or inventory of AWM series by agency recording and the complete AWM series registrations in number order. There were a number of tasks involved for Archives staff in the production of the separate ANGAM III microfiche report from RINSE. The tasks associated with the production of the ANGAM I microfiche had to be duplicated for ANGAM III, even though the actual size of the final product was small. The tasks included:

(i)   preparing separate specifications for Archives' Systems Management Section to produce computer tapes for the Micrographics Bureau of the Australian Government Publishing Service;

(ii)   preparing and maintaining separate programming code;

(iii) checking the content and presentation of the fiche, which followed a different format to that of the ANGAM I fiche; and

(iv) preparing user information to explain the relationship between the ANGAM I finding aid and the ANGAM III finding aid.

The inclusion of information about AWM series in ANGAM I will significantly simplify the microfiche production tasks.

The program for training Memorial staff in using RINSE commenced in November 1989, when terminals were installed in the Memorial's Research Centre by the Archives' Systems Management Section, giving online access to RINSE. This program was undertaken in two stages. In November 1989 about twenty Research Centre staff received training in RINSE retrieval. Training packages, with a military perspective, were prepared and the staff had individual training sessions. Follow up by Australian Archives staff has continued past these formal training sessions.

Official Records staff were then trained in the CRS system and in data entry aspects of RINSE, using existing and new AWM series registrations as the basis of the training sessions. Selected staff also received training by the Systems Management Section in printer and terminal maintenance, communication network systems and procedures for reporting faults and other system problems.

While Memorial staff, especially those in the Official Records sub-section, are becoming more confident with the CRS system and RINSE, the need for close contact with Archives and training is ongoing. As staff move, there will always be new and refresher training needs, even when Memorial staff can effectively meet their own requirements. Also, if staff do not use RINSE or prepare registrations on a regular basis, the time taken by training will remain relatively high.[4]

Issues

The main problem confronting the Memorial with RINSE results from the idiosyncratic (and less than strictly archival) way in which the Official Records Collection was built up since its origins in the work of the Australian Imperial Force's (AIF) Australian War Records Section in London in the latter stages of the 1914–18 War. The interpretation of what constitutes 'a series' in the collection, as applied since the early 1980's[5], has led to an astonishing mix within the range of AWM series:

(i)   natural series—eg those where an original numerical or other filing system exists;

(ii) artificial series—eg those where the filing system has been created by one agency (usually the former AWM Library), while the content derives from several others (albeit, mostly defence-related); and

(iii) recognisable record groups—eg collection based series actually comprising a number of convenient "subseries".

Figure. 1 Helen Wyatt of the Archives (centre) trains Official Records staff, Paul Mansfield and Janet Marshall, in RINSE (AWM photograph).

At the time of the Control Systems Working Group (1986 to early 1987), Archives was still developing the RINSE system, so the way the AWM series information would be added to the database and how much needed to be added had not been finalised. For example, there was no definite information available about how the fields identified for the summary AWM series registrations would meet the mandatory validations of the computer system. As RINSE did not become fully operational until November 1987, the different timing in the recommendations of the working group and the implementation of RINSE did affect some of the initial decisions.

The CRS system, with the added validation power of RINSE, requires very precise matching of information. However, the original guideline for Memorial staff preparing registrations for RINSE was to "keep it simple". While founded on good intent, and certain practicalities, the information provided proved generally reliable. In particular, a lack of specificity compounded the difficulty of building up correct linkage between and within series—eg the validation of series date range with agency creating/recording, and making a workable distinction between the latter.

Figure 2 illustrates some of these problems.

One of the most time consuming aspects of the data entry process for Archives was the need to establish each AWM series' compatibility with the CRS system and with RINSE. As well, Archives staff had to make sure the agency and person recording the series were on RINSE. For both these criteria, clarification was often required before the data could be successfully entered.

RINSE was modified to accommodate the AWM prefix, (as opposed to the normal CRS prefix[6]), but it proved costly to implement and maintain, for database specifications, software code and for procedures. An added complication for the Memorial staff was the requirement to use, in certain situations, a CRS W prefix instead of the more familiar AWM prefix. This added to the complexity of training staff mostly unfamiliar with the CRS system anyway. The need to use the CRS W prefix will discontinue when an upgrade of the database management software on which RINSE is structured (BASISplus) is implemented.

Other problems have been associated with matching the information on the original AWM summary data entry forms with the standard RINSE data entry forms and refinements to those forms (twice since the original 1987 version due to system changes). The form will change again with the conversion of RINSE to BASISplus. Increasingly, AWM series documentation is reflecting the imposed external discipline of CRS procedures and RINSE requirements, for both the entry of registrations onto RINSE and the format and the terminology of the printed reports. For example, the Official Records subsection has traditionally used the term "agency creating", but the CRS system and RINSE currently use "agency recording".

While developing an acceptable standard for such documentation has been a major Official Records subsection preoccupation in the last three years, it has not easily accommodated the CRS procedures within the context of its small staff resource. It is, after all, the resource of another institution which performs multiple functions and has its own inhouse priorities and programs to meet. Nevertheless, one could say that the Memorial's contribution to RINSE came of age early this year with the attainment of full registration entry and update rights by Official Records staff for agencies, persons and series.

User benefit

The main purpose in incorporating information about records in the Memorial's custody in the Australian Archives' RINSE system was to enhance the national information resource about Commonwealth and selected other records. This is being achieved. The greater degree of uniformity of information provided can only improve everyone's understanding of a major Australian archival finding aid.

Figure 2:   AWM series report from RINSE

NUMBER	SERIES TITLE AND AGENCIES RECORDING]	DATE RANGE
AWM28	Recommendation files for honours and awards, AIF, 1914-18 War	c 1915 - c 1919
	1915 - 1919 : CA 6 , Department of Defence [I]	
AWM165	Index cards to recommendations for honours and awards, AIF, 1914-18 War	c 1938- [1915-1920]
	1938 - : CA 616 , Australian War Memorial	
AWM54	Written Records, 1939-45 War	c. 1951- [by 1939-]
	c 1951 - : CA 616 , Australian War Memorial	

As more registrations are added to RINSE, the Memorial is likely to replace its current series forms with the reports from RINSE as the paper record of those registrations. This will increase the consistency and compatibility of descriptive information, reduce the necessity of keeping separate manual finding aids, and limit keying time to database entry rather than word processing (or both).

The real impact of online access to RINSE in the day to day life of the Memorial's Research Centre is yet to be realised. Reference staff are developing expertise with RINSE retrieval, and Official Records staff who need to understand the basic principles of the CRS system for registration purposes are learning to adapt them to suit the needs of the collection.

However the real advance with the database is that users across Australia now have access to information on all defence and war related records through either the Memorial or Regional Offices of the Archives. Likewise, staff in both organisations are made more aware that their own holdings of like records or those on particular subjects are not exhaustive.

ANGAM II

History

Access examination of the Official Records Collection, following procedures developed within Australian Archives and endorsed by the Archives Act 1983, began in the mid 1970's. It was necessitated by, and followed fairly closely on the heels of, the introduction of the 30 year rule and accelerated release of 1939–45 War records. Similar to the Control

Systems Working Group, an Access Working Group was convened in 1986 to assess access examination arrangements for the collection.

Until December 1986, all examination was done by Australian Archives staff. Since then, with the employment of an access examiner by the Memorial, the same procedures have been followed, including the generation of worksheets for individual access jobs, access series dossiers, and an access card register. The one difference had been, for a time, the production of two sets of access cards. To eliminate duplicate cards and consolidate the register was a necessary Memorial preliminary to ANGAM II data entry. Two major 1939–45 War series comprised the bulk of the register and, in the course of keying, it was also possible to further edit out a considerable number of unnecessary additional cards from these series (especially file part entries).

Data entry commenced in April 1989 and, by early November that year, some 35,000 entries had been keyed. These included the entire edited access register and all access examination decisions made since the register's cut-off date (November 1988). With subsequent keying, the total number of entries is now almost 50,000. Examples of items held by the Memorial that have been entered onto ANGAM II are given at Figure 3.

Resources
Although editing of the access register was done inhouse by the Memorial, the keying of entries into ANGAM II was not. Because the Project was discrete, it proved quite straight forward to work off Memorial premises. The opportunity to employ a contract data processing officer (DPO) and, later, a second, using Australian Archives terminals, made a significant difference to the time required (six months) to complete the initial data entry.

In addition, training in ANGAM II retrieval and data entry was simplified because Archives' access procedures were already known to Official Records staff. The latter were able to assume all responsibility for data entry, including training the DPO. Nevertheless, the Memorial has appreciated Archives support in identifying the main areas for checking uniformity and correctness of entry and simplifying the gathering of access statistics. One DPO continues to be employed, assisting with data cleanup and current data entry.

Issues
Having successfully completed the initial ANGAM II data entry, it was necessary for Official Records staff to come to terms with the discrepancies between a technologically produced finding aid containing a substantial amount of out of date and inaccurate item information, and a respectable number of recently-produced manual finding aids with up to date and accurate item information. To reduce the degree of discrepancy, several

inventories drawn up since early 1988 as part of arrangement and description work have been keyed. Many original access register card entries in ANGAM II have consequently been amended or cancelled. On-going data cleanup includes a spelling check of item titles, to improve the databases's capacity for keyword searching by users.

Increasingly, access examination is being closely tied to the preparation of item level inventories. The prospect, consequently, is towards the production of hard copy inventories from the database and the elimination of manually prepared inventories.

User benefit

Users have access to ANGAM II through online terminals located in the Memorial's Research Centre and all Australian Archives Regional Offices. A microfiche edition, produced annually, is also available, but its main value is as a backup to the online database. The ANGAM II database is recognisably user-friendly. In the Research Centre, it has to be, because reference staff are also directly servicing two other databases, the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) and the Memorial's own

Figure 3:   Item report for AWM series from ANGAM II

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Series/Accession  number      : :  AWM54
Item number                   : :  1/1/1
Item title                    : :  Australian  Military  Forces  -  2nd  Military
                                    district - Instructions - Failure to attend camp -
                                    Warrant  for  the  arrest  of  the  Absconder  or
                                    Deserter  or  person  liable  to  be  tried  by  Court
                                    Martial.  Order  for  delivery  into  Military
                                    custody  of  a  person  liable  to  be  tried  by  Court
                                    Martial  for  an  offence.  Form  of  Certificate
                                    [abbreviated]
Item date range               : :  1939-1940
Access  decision              : :  OPEN
Date of decision              : :  28 Jul 1975
Dossier reference             : :  PT8 F23
Location                      : :  AWM
Database accession number     : :  453770


Series/Accession  number      : :  AWM54
Item number                   : :  9/2/5
Item title                    : :  Northern   Territory   Force   Administration
                                    Orders No's 1 to 31 Jan to May 1944
Item date range               : :  1944-1944
Access  decision              : :  OPEN
Date of decision              : :  29 Jul 1975
Dossier reference             : :  PT8 F18
Location                      : :  AWM
Database accession number     : :  453898
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ADP system. The latter provides access to private records, photographs, and other collections. ANGAM II's facility for item level information searches in particular is proving its acceptability.

Conclusion

As this article goes to press, several future developments are under consideration. Firstly, it is likely that within the next twelve months, public users in both Archives Regional Offices and the Memorial's Research Centre will be given direct online access to RINSE, further reducing their reliance on reference staff assistance. This online access will also complement ANGAM II, which has been available to the public in Archives Regional Offices since 1987 and in the Memorial since late 1989.

Secondly, of immeasurable benefit to the Memorial, is the possibility of data transfer of a portion of the AWM component of RINSE and ANGAM II onto the Memorial's own ADP system for information retrieval purposes. This would facilitate the total integration and accessibility of descriptive information about the several collections which the Memorial manages.

Thirdly, the planned review of the agency and series components of the CRS system will hopefully consider and look kindly upon the descriptive environment of the Official Records Collection, and in fact any system that does not follow the strict hierarchical structure of the CRS system. Any opportunity to more easily accommodate the Memorial's "series" system can only add to the value and use of the information for staff and public users alike.

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The addition of Memorial agencies, persons and series to RINSE indicates its ability to accommodate archival control systems not following the pure series structure. Even though the Memorial has followed Archives' procedures for ANGAM II information, the flexibility of the new BASIS-plus software will help both the databases to adapt to changing environments, including adding information from other institutions, at agency, series or item level.

The sharing of information between the two institutions through the Australian Archives' databases perhaps illustrates the first step towards taking advantage of one of the opportunities provided by the Archives Act 1983, namely that the Australian National Register of Records include records of other institutions.

Cooperation is not one sided. With projects discussed, an automated environment has made the cooperation much easier, less resource intensive and will better equip both the Memorial and the Archives to develop

and expand the joint information base. Our case study illustrates the advantages to two great national institutions, and to their users.

FOOTNOTES

1. Both ANGAM II and RINSE have been developed on BASIS (currently Release K), a database management software system. A significant upgrade of the software was released in October 1989, called BASISplus. The combination of the text retrieval and relational capabilities of BASISplus will give both systems more flexibility and significant scope for expansion. At the time of writing ANGAM II had been converted and RINSE was in the process of being converted.

2. Prior to April 1988, the Official Records subsection was within the Written Records Section. It is currently part of the Printed and Written Records Section, Research Collections and Services Branch.

3. As the Memorial had already allocated 236 AWM series numbers, it was important that these numbers were retained, particularly as the registration were not keyed in sequentially. RINSE, which normally adds the next number automatically, was modified to accommodate the AWM series requirements and this certainly eased the descriptive work for Memorial staff.

4. Maintaining adequate levels of expertise and the constant need for training is a problem at Archives too and, in fact, for most organisations with automated databases. RINSE has undergone two major changes since 1987, both of which involved significant staff retraining.

5. AWM series derive, in part, from the listing of descriptive titles published in Appendix A of Michael Piggott, *A General Guide to the Library Collections and Archives in the Australian War Memorial* (2nd edition, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1983), p. 39.

6. RINSE was originally designed to accept only one format for the series number. This meant that the AWM prefix could not be used in all situations and the 'CRS W' prefix had to be used. Converting reports from the default 'W prefix' to the AWM prefix also required considerable resources. RINSE on BASISplus works differently, so any format of series number will be accepted, a good sign for future directions of RINSE.