

Letter to the Editor

I refer to Alison Pilger's article *Archivists and Historians: The Balance Beam of Professional Identity* published in the November 1992 *Archives and Manuscripts* and feel compelled to write to set the record straight.

While I congratulate Ms Pilger on her thorough and excellent review of the North American literature on the archivist/historian debate, I take issue with the conclusions she draws as well as her omission of relevant Australian writing on the topic.

Ms Pilger's article concludes 'that debate on this universal issue has been completely hijacked by North American archivists'. Nothing could be further from the truth. North American archivists haven't hijacked the debate, they own that particular debate.

While the Australian archival profession currently shares much in common with North American colleagues, particularly Canadian, the origins of the profession differ significantly in our two countries. In Canada archival ancestors can be found in the Learned Societies, in Australia they are found in the main in the Library profession (although many Australian Archives' trained archivists like myself have attempted to minimize that background). While I recall some minor discussion in the early 1970s on the archivist/historian links and many new archivists of this era entered the profession with history degrees, there has not been a significant link between the two disciplines in this country. When the Australian Society of Archivists was formed in the mid 1970s, the concerns over identity related to librarianship and records management, which concerns featured regularly in our professional literature and conference discussion through to the present day.

And it was in this context of the relationship with librarians and records managers that George Bolotenko's article was first aired at the 6th Biennial Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists in Perth in April 1987. The published papers of the Conference provide the text of a paper I presented entitled *Interfacing with the Other Well-Dwellers in the 80s*. I seized upon the inspiration of Bolotenko's text and shaped a paper around what I saw as the Australian context of 'keepers of the well'. Unfortunately the present conference papers do not record the ensuing panel discussion at this session which included remarks by Briton, Michael Roper and Canadian, Jane Nokes, on the Bolotenko debate.

For Australia, the archivist/historian relationship properly belongs on the level of the development of cooperative strategies. For some North Americans the archivist as historian is alive and well and still much debated as was apparent in Montreal in September 1992. However, Australian archivists of the 1990s would do better to debate what I have described as their 'audit' role and their responsibilities to the evidential aspects of the ubiquitous term 'information'.

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