

EDITORIAL

This journal issue was inspired in the depths of the 1993 Melbourne winter during which a group of twenty archivists, records managers, and teachers and students of archival science, gathered at Monash University's Graduate Department of Librarianship, Archives and Records for a two week 'intensive residential' workshop *Understanding Electronic Information Systems* presented by David Bearman of Archives and Museum Informatics, Pittsburgh, USA. At the time the continuance of *Archives and Manuscripts* was uncertain, yet some of those present felt a strong desire to continue to publish the achievements of Australian archival thought and development. It was not the bleak and barren Clayton landscape which provided the inspiration but the unique forum for professional exchange and development provided by the workshop, combined with the infectious enthusiasm of our colleague and course presenter which left many of us with a sense of urgency to progress our understanding of electronic records strategies and to enunciate these in the Australian context.

The idea of a thematic journal issue on Electronic Recordkeeping flourished during the spring as a number of archival colleagues, not all 'Monash Survivors', agreed to contribute to enhance our collective knowledge and to stimulate ongoing debate. The major part of this issue was put together some six months after its conception at the height of a torrid Queensland summer. By contrast the landscape was warm and inviting, with the afternoon clouds brooding with the promise of some long-awaited and refreshing rain. The archival profession has brooded on electronic records for many years, some would say for far too long,¹ but many of us now see a refreshing change on the horizon. As summer now yields to the mild changes of a sub-tropical autumn this gathering of writings on electronic recordkeeping issues has taken full shape to demonstrate that while professional thinking and practice is somewhere beyond custody, it is not somewhere over the rainbow,² but has specific direction to be pursued at both the macro and micro archival levels.

In October 1990 at the *Keeping Data* Workshop — the Australian archival profession's first serious attempt to collectively come to grips with electronic records issues — I urged my colleagues to choose a pathway clearly visible in archival theory and Australian tradition and to place first the moral defence of the record regardless of its form or media.³ This presentation, now regarded as the first Australian entry

into the post-custodial discourse,⁴ was based firmly on an extrapolation of Jenkinsonian principles and reflected Australian Archives training of the early seventies. The fundamental precept of this training was an holistic approach to viewing and understanding organisational activity and development through analysis and documentation of recordkeeping systems and then through the series of records within these systems. Indeed, on reflection, the incarnation of the series system that existed at that time was in essence a system for capturing metadata, intended as a knowledge representation of the administrative development, processes and activities of the Australian Government. My 1990 views, however, owed as much to my professional activity at the micro level, as a corporate archivist or recordkeeping professional at the coalface of a large tertiary institution, as they did to the macro level training and experience I had benefited from at Australian Archives. These twin strands of experience and the strategies which evolve from them are reflected in the writings in this issue and in the approaches taken in various sectors within the profession. Combined with the recognition of the primacy of sound recordkeeping to underpin and chart the re-emergence of the requirement for government and corporate accountability, they provide the current linchpin for Australian archival activity at the coalface.

Basic concepts have a profound effect on the approaches taken by archivists and records managers to their work. David Roberts contributes significantly to reshaping these concepts with his article *Defining Electronic Records, Documents and Data*. He analyses the concept of the record exploring this and related concepts within the framework currently being undertaken at the Records Management Office of New South Wales to re-examine its doctrine, to redefine and communicate its mission and to support accountability in the NSW public sector.

The question of how to manage electronic mail as a record is one that will confront management in every contemporary organisation within the next few years. David Bearman applies a generic framework for managing electronic records to define an approach to accountable corporate management of electronic mail. In recent years Bearman has forged strong links with the Australian recordkeeping profession — a relationship from which a two way influence is evident. His article *Managing Electronic Mail* has been developed from several presentations in the US and at the Monash University Workshop in June 1993. Its appearance in this journal is timely as many Australian organisations, including my own, begin the task of building the essential elements of 'recordness' into electronic mail as part of the process of taming the beast and coaxing it to behave as a good corporate citizen.⁵

The pro-active strategies and the role and influence of a corporate archivist working at the coalface of archival electronic activity are demonstrated in the article *Electronic Records Systems in the Roads & Traffic Authority NSW* by Anne Picot. This article describes three computerised systems as a basis to illustrate some disposal and design problems and the various approaches at the micro archival level that have been taken to deal with them. From a work-in-progress vantage it highlights the translation of traditional archival theory to successful corporate operation.

The Medium is NOT the Message by Greg O'Shea focuses on the methodology being developed by Australian Archives to appraise electronic records. It is significant for the context it provides in documenting the development of appraisal practices over the years at our national archival authority as well as for the opportunities for discussion it raises from the detailed case study and methodology presented therein. It charts current thought on archival intervention in electronic records and provides some preliminary costing estimates for retaining transactional records of archival value in an electronic environment.

The archival management of electronic personal records is notably absent from the increasing literature on electronic recordkeeping. Adrian Cunningham's opening volley on this topic *The Archival Management of Personal Records in Electronic Form: Some Suggestions* draws the matter to the attention of the Australian archival community. He addresses his suggestions as much to colleagues working within the historic manuscripts tradition as to those hitherto concerned with electronic issues, from the government or organisational sectors.

Organisations are in a period of transition from the creation and use of paper-based records to dependency on electronic documents. They need a common approach to the management of electronic records to satisfy good information management as well as to meet specific accountability requirements and legislative concerns. Dagmar Parer and Keith Parrott detail the best practices approach adopted by Australian Archives in their article *Management Practices in the Electronic Records Environment*.

Jenni Davidson and Luisa Moscato look at another application of a best practices approach within a large corporate context in their article *Towards an Electronic Records Management Program: The University of Melbourne*. They describe strategies Records Services staff at the University have taken to position themselves to assume responsibility for the development of electronic records management policy, guidelines and standards and for the establishment of an electronic records management program.

In *Somewhere Beyond Custody* Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish provide an exciting exploration of the shifts that are occurring in archival ways of thinking and practising as we move beyond custody. They draw evidence of these shifts from recent Australian literature which forms part of the evolving international discourse on electronic records management and from that which reflects records management and archival action at the coalface. This article places a bookmark in the archival testament to which many will want to return. It is compelling reading for all recordkeeping professionals.

The Monash Workshop itself, which stimulated this thematic journal issue, is the subject of Sue McKemmish's review article *Understanding Electronic Information Systems: Understanding Ourselves*. She documents the program and discoveries of this significant and, to date in Australia, unique educational exercise for experienced recordkeeping professionals. This workshop, in retrospect more appropriately retitled *Understanding Electronic Recordkeeping Systems*, went far beyond information systems analysis and design concerns to address critical issues of how to transform information systems into recordkeeping systems, and to re-invent the profession along the way. Some of the issues raised at the workshop are enunciated in section three of Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No 18, *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*. Barbara Reed picks up on these and the Australian archival community's response to the management of electronic records in her review article *Electronic Records Management in Transition* which is based on this report. She reflects on the advantages of our holistic approach to recordkeeping as a building block for the development of electronic recordkeeping strategies and offers some considered items for advancing the agenda in this country, which she was so instrumental in setting along with David Roberts.

The seven articles in this journal provide a range of perspectives on electronic recordkeeping issues. They contain invaluable insights into theory, work-in-progress and program operation at both the macro and micro levels. They are complemented by an analysis, drawn from a review of selected Australian and overseas literature, of the Australian archival response to electronic records issues and our part in the post-custodial discourse which is reshaping the profession. The two review articles focus on understanding ourselves as recordkeeping professionals at a time when electronic records management is in transition. These are followed by a number of reviews of recent literature related to electronic recordkeeping issues.

This compilation represents the third publication in the series which began with the publication of *Keeping Data* in 1991. It demonstrates a

healthy and vigorous profession that has indeed taken up the challenge to change.⁶

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The willingness of my Australian archival colleagues to contribute to this issue is gratefully acknowledged as is the opportunity afforded by the Monash Workshop and the inspiration and contribution of its presenter.

ENDNOTES

1. Steve Stuckey lamented in the pages of this journal on the three threats to archivists and their programs — his 'Archival Unholy Trinity'. Foremost of these was 'our inability or unwillingness to tackle the electronic records issue in a practical and timely way'. See Steve Stuckey's review of 'Without Consent: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information in Public Archives' in *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 21, no. 1, May 1993, p. 117.
2. With acknowledgment to Frank Upward and Sue McKemish and to Judy Garland respectively.
3. Glenda Acland, 'Archivist — Keeper, Undertaker or Auditor: The Challenge for Traditional Archival Theory and Practice' in Barbara Reed and David Roberts, editors, *Keeping Data: Papers from a Workshop on Appraising Computer-based Records, 10–12 October 1990*, Australian Council of Archives and Australian Society of Archivists, 1991, pp. 115–119.
4. As noted by Terry Cook during his November 1993 lecture tour of Australia and by Frank Upward and Sue McKemish in their article 'Somewhere Beyond Custody' in this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*.
5. David Bearman uses this appealing analogy of the computer as a beast, an untamed creature out of sorts in polite company and at odds with the values of the corporation, needing to be harnessed to behave as a good corporate citizen, in his 'Preface' to Margaret Hedstrom, editor, *Electronic Records Management Program Strategies*, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No. 18, 1993, pp. i-ii.
6. Glenda Acland, *op. cit.*