

# Letters to the Editor

## Preservation I

Centre for Information Studies  
Wagga Wagga NSW 2678  
18 July 1994

Dear Sir

Thank you for sending us the review of Ross Harvey's *Preservation in Australian and New Zealand Libraries* by Colin Webb.\*

While we appreciate the attention devoted to this title by your journal, I feel it is important to correct a number of inaccuracies in Mr Webb's review.

1. '...The first edition was released in 1990 (basically as a text for students in the librarianship course at Charles Sturt University...' This is incorrect. The book was not published for students at CSU and until recently there has not been a subject here for which the book could be used. It is interesting to note that, despite the book's antipodean focus, it has been adopted as a text by several library schools overseas.
2. '... There are passages ... where one could easily get the message that techniques can be applied in isolation.' No, one could get this message only by reading out of context, and Dr Harvey very carefully advises readers to take a contextual approach to preservation. Indeed, in his next breath your reviewer assumes this: 'This is a book to be read as a whole rather than one for dipping into'.
3. 'It is quite reasonable to view the entire book as an extended annotated bibliography. It is apparent that most of the information comes from a scholarly review of the literature.' Again, this is incorrect. It is nothing like an extended annotated bibliography, unless Mr Webb views the scholarly apparatus of referencing as some sort of bibliography. Furthermore, Dr Harvey is an experienced professional whose views are based on practice and scholarship, and he has considerable experience in leading preservation workshops for practitioners here and overseas. It is unfortunate that Mr Webb has chosen to

---

\* *Archives and Manuscripts*, May 1994, pp. 192-6

cast Dr Harvey in the mould of ivory tower academic (an entirely honourable occupation) when this book deals so clearly with professional practice.

4. At the same time Dr Harvey is not a prophet or fortune-teller, so it is quite out of order for your reviewer to criticise the book for not giving '...enough attention to the juggling act preservation managers will have to perform when the costs of data conversion and transfer become clearer'. When they do become clearer, I am sure that Dr Harvey will devote reasonable attention to juggling. Were he to do so now, I suspect that Mr Webb would only criticise the book for not being based on fact.

The fact that Dr Harvey's book is now in a second edition here, and has been published overseas in a two volume expansion under my editorial aegis, indicates its very positive reception by librarians, archivists and information managers. I believe that Mr Webb is in a significant minority when he criticises the above points, which others have regarded as the book's strengths.

Yours faithfully  
Dr G E Gorman FLA FRSA  
Deputy Director

## Preservation II

National Library of Australia  
Parkes ACT 2600  
25 August 1994

Dear Sir

I have the following comments in response to Dr Gorman's letter regarding my review of Ross Harvey's book. My comments refer to his numbered points, followed by some general observations.

1. I apologise for getting this wrong. While I had reasons for making the mistake, I should have checked my facts.
2. I am surprised that Dr Gorman doesn't see that my comments about applying techniques in isolation was mainly meant to be instructive to a potential reader. It is easy enough to read indexed passages on techniques out of context in a 412 page book, regardless of the author's best intentions

and efforts. There is less excuse for Dr Gorman to quote my comment out of context than for a librarian, hungry for technical guidance to fix a particular problem, to find and read bits of the book out of context. I believe it was useful for the review to reinforce Dr Harvey's message that they must *not* do that.

But it was also meant as a criticism, though less than Dr Gorman infers. A small amount of the material in the book did not seem to sit comfortably with the author's declared intention. It seemed as if he had written his excellent introductory and context-setting remarks, and then picked up his notes from his technical sources, and reproduced their tone. This detracted from the book's purpose in ways that I later explained in the review: 'Missing is discussion of the manager's responsibility to understand and consider ... the role of treatment (not the details, but the kinds of questions a preservation manager should ask about treatment: what is it good for? What are the constraints which apply to it? How do I manage it as an option?); and again, all the problem-solving, negotiation, management skills involved in making it happen'.

3. It surely helps a reader to suggest ways in which a book can be approached, and the image of an extended annotated bibliography suggests one appropriate and helpful way of reading this book. Rather than being a slight on 'the scholarly apparatus of referencing', the review spoke of it as a source of strength. But it was also a weakness, in that the referencing seemed to exclude a personal response to the imperatives of direct experience. The review went on to illustrate what I meant by that.

The issue here was not my respect for Dr Harvey's professionalism or professional experience. The issue was the impact of his professional experience in the book. Because I thought that mattered, the review needed to reflect on it and on why, as a preservation manager it made a difference to me in reading the book.

This was not a matter of the 'ivory tower academic' versus the practical man of facts and action which Dr Gorman reads into the review. Slogans and stereotypes only trivialise what I was proposing as a serious issue regarding the state of preservation and of writing about preservation. I believe I implied clearly enough that we are at a point where the visionary nature of what the book is about requires something more to give it a visionary impact—and that will come from preservation managers really putting their personal experience through the kind of conceptual structure this book suggests.

4. If Dr Gorman is not willing to have Dr Harvey juggle until he knows what he is juggling, he has missed one of the key characteristics of modern preservation management in libraries and archives. We are required to be prophets and fortune-tellers. Coping with this demand is one of our main responsibilities and a major source of stress and failure.

And he misses my point if he thinks I would criticise the book for not being based on facts and unknown costs. I was not looking for facts, but for reality. The review says that I found a lot of it, but would have liked a bit more.

Apart from the first point, on which I freely admit I was wrong, I suggest that Dr Gorman is talking about judgements with which he disagrees, rather than facts to be dismissed as wrong.

He accuses me of attacking that 'which others have regarded as the book's strengths'. In some cases what I am criticising is very close to a strength, but the review always gives credit to the strength before mentioning what I saw as the problem. In other cases I think Dr Gorman's comments are simply irrelevant, suggesting that he did not read my review with anything like the attention I paid to Dr Harvey's book. Disparagement on this basis is (at the least) unhelpful in the field of scholarly review.

The review was predominantly positive—there is a need for Dr Harvey's book, and many people will find it useful. To the extent that I felt there were things requiring negative comment, I sought to make that comment constructive and helpful to the reader, not condemnatory. It is unfortunate that Dr Gorman chooses to represent what were cautious, conscientious—and solicited—professional opinions as carping unfair criticism.

Colin Webb  
Manager, Technical Preservation  
National Library of Australia

## Position of Editor

Manuscripts Section  
Mitchell Library  
State Library of New South Wales  
28 June 1994

Dear Sir

I wish to correct a misunderstanding which has crept into the May 1994 number of *Archives and Manuscripts*. In the Editorial, the guest editor, Glenda Acland states that 'at the time [June 1993] the continuance of *Archives and Manuscripts* was uncertain....'.

I do apologise if I conveyed inadvertently to Glenda this impression when she most generously volunteered to edit this issue.

Let me assure all readers of *Archives and Manuscripts* that Council at no time contemplated ceasing the publication of our flagship journal.

We were without an editor. However, the November 1993 issue was in hand and I was confident that an editor would be found for the 1994 numbers. In extremis, I have no doubt that Council would have paid someone to edit the journal rather than ceasing publication.

Paul Brunton  
Immediate Past President

## Errata

**Mick Masson**, *Surviving the Dole Years: The 1930s—a personal story*, Kensington, New South Wales University Press, 1993. 189pp. ISBN 0 86840 285 0.

This publication was reviewed in Volume 22 May 1994 Number 1, by John McGuire, Department of History, The University of Queensland. The following are the correct **Endnotes** 3 and 4:

- 3 Surviving the Dole Years, p. 68.
- 4 Surviving the Dole Years, p.17.