

Editorial: Beyond corporate accountability

Nowhere is the dualistic nature of the archival profession in Australia more neatly encapsulated than in the title of its professional journal. In 1955 when *Archives and Manuscripts* commenced publication few if any of the professionals active at the time would have had any difficulty with the division of archival materials into the two categories, which may perhaps be more accurately described as 'Archives: corporate and personal'. This duality is of course a consequence of the library origins of both the ASA itself and the North American historical manuscripts tradition, origins which members of the emergent government archives sector in Australia at first either rejected or struggled to transcend.

More recently there have been rumblings of discontent with the title. In 1989 Peter Crush argued *inter alia* that the division was both misleading and counterproductive.¹ He reminded us that personal papers are archives and that to have the term manuscripts set in juxtaposition with archives suggests that personal papers are something other than archives. Crush cut to the heart of what is one of the most serious issues facing the profession. While I would not suggest for one moment that we jettison a title that has served us well for over forty years it is time for some clear thinking on the issue. Interestingly, the reaction of some of my personal papers colleagues to Peter Crush's conference paper was to become defensive in the face of what they saw as another attack on the historic manuscripts tradition by a government archivist. This reaction, while it of course betrayed a careless reading of Crush's thesis, nevertheless highlighted the raw nerve of strained relations between the two subgroups of the profession. While Crush was arguing for an integrated approach to all categories of archival materials, he was misread as saying that personal papers are beneath the dignity of real (i.e. corporate) archivists. This sensitivity is perhaps one reason why there has been a noticeable diminution of personal papers-related articles in *Archives and Manuscripts*.

The publication of this theme issue is therefore an attempt at redressing and reversing an unfortunate trend. If you like, it is an attempt to put the manuscripts back into *Archives and Manuscripts*. While its publication can be seen to be a perpetuation of the division bemoaned by Peter Crush, it has

been deemed necessary to put personal recordkeeping back on the agenda by means of a bit of positive discrimination. Ultimately, it would be my wish to have a fully integrated discourse in the literature, one in which most if not all issues were considered in relation to both the organisational and personal records dimensions. However, before this can happen personal papers need to be rescued from the professional obscurity into which they appear to have fallen in the face of the recent preoccupation with corporate accountability. If this theme issue were to have a different subtitle it would be 'Personal Papers are Records'. This message is aimed at both those corporate archivists who are inclined to be dismissive of personal papers as archives and also at those personal papers custodians who are inclined to be dismissive of the recordness of the material they manage. It has always been my contention that there is much more that unites corporate records archivists and personal records archivists than there is that separates them. While there are important and illuminating differences between the two categories of records, they are all archives and can all be most effectively managed and preserved by the application of a common body of archival theory and practice. This theme issue is my case for the (Jenkinsonian) defence of personal papers as records. I am most grateful for the expert witnesses who have come forward with testimony on behalf of the defence case.

The issue opens with two papers presented at the Collecting Archives Special Interest Group panel session at last year's annual conference. Together these two papers set the agenda for the articles that follow. My paper laments the absence of collecting archives concerns from the archival literature and urges collecting archivists to end their lethargy and contribute to what has recently been a lopsided discourse. The issue you hold in your hand can be seen as the first fruits of this call to action. Chris Hurley succinctly identifies the core issues facing collecting archivists ('Beating the French') and proposes a long-term research project to identify the literary warrant and functional requirements for personal recordkeeping and socio-historical evidence ('a parallel-Pittsburgh Project').

In order to emphasise the commonality between personal papers and corporate records I have deliberately ordered the remaining articles in the theme issue in such a way as to mirror the dimensions of the records continuum as proposed by Frank Upward, Sue McKemmish, David Roberts and others.² This has been done in order to highlight the fact that the records continuum model can apply equally as well to personal records as it has already been applied to corporate records. McKemmish has written a stimulating piece that examines personal recordkeeping holistically in the

light of the entire records continuum. She takes up Chris Hurley's suggestion and searches for clues as to the literary warrant for personal recordkeeping. She argues cogently that the warrant lies in social conditioning and individual psychological motivations to create and preserve a durable body of 'evidence of me', which, when these records are transferred to the archival domain, collectively become 'evidence of us'.

Richard Cox's article is a similarly wide-ranging rumination on the nature of personal records management by archivists and manuscripts curators. It is a ringing reminder that personal papers are records and have to be treated as records. Cox's article relates, as does McKemmish's, to the entire records continuum. It assesses the viability and effectiveness of collecting as a strategy for contributing to the formation and preservation of society's collective memory. Collecting is also the focus of Graeme Powell's contribution. By surveying the twenty instalments of the *Guide to Collections of Manuscripts Relating to Australia* together with some other sources, Powell is able to map the nature and trends of personal papers collecting by archives and manuscript repositories in this country. The resulting picture is one of a depressingly ad hoc and lopsided national collection. This then begs the obvious question of how best to address the situation. Both Powell and Cox suggest that the way ahead lies in a proactive nationally coordinated approach to macro-appraisal based on the North American functions-centred documentation model. I sincerely hope that these suggestions are taken up, not just in future issues of *Archives and Manuscripts*, but also through such representative bodies as the Australian Council of Archives.

Gavan McCarthy and Tim Sherratt's article relates to the creation and capture dimensions of the continuum. They identify recent detrimental changes to scientific recordkeeping practices and call for sustained research into the current state of scientific recordkeeping and into the tactics that archivists will need to employ to ensure the preservation of our nation's scientific memory.

In the next article Paul Dalgleish examines the application of appraisal techniques to the papers of members of Federal Parliament. This collection level appraisal or micro-appraisal needs to be contrasted with the macro-appraisal tactics argued by Cox and Powell. While very different, both types of appraisal are essential given the sheer bulk and duplication of modern records. I am particularly grateful to Paul Dalgleish for addressing a topic that many professionals in the personal records sphere feel is the exclusive domain of corporate archivists.³

Documentation is the next aspect of the records continuum to receive attention. The archival staff of South Australia's Mortlock Library, Margaret Southcott, Roger Andre and Neil Thomas, have supplied an illuminating series of arrangement and description case studies. Arrangement and description is of course the bread and butter of most personal records curators and was the subject of the celebrated Powell/Hurley debate of over twenty years ago.⁴ It has always been my feeling that amongst the theoretically top-heavy literature in this area there is an absence of case study data which can permit the useful linkage of theory with practice. The Mortlock cases go some way to redressing this imbalance.

A vital, though often neglected component of the records continuum is the research use of records. Jenkinson himself reminded us that what may come to be seen as an afterthought is in fact our ultimate *raison d'être*.⁵ Literary historian Maryanne Dever gives us a fascinating insight into the subtleties and dilemmas of researching personal correspondence. Unwittingly perhaps, she provides more than a few clues in answer to Chris Hurley's musings on literary warrant.

The theme issue ends with a piece that examines a subsidiary component of the research dimension of the records continuum, that of publication of records. In it I examine a selection of recently published volumes of letters and diaries in the hope of discerning something about both the nature of personal recordkeeping practices and also the literary warrant for personal recordkeeping. In the process I highlight the self-conscious nature of much personal recordkeeping, taking issue with Jenkinson who argued that records must always be natural, 'truthful' and unselfconscious.⁶

An addendum to the theme issue is Judy English-Ellis' commentary on the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*. While not solely related to personal papers, this piece has been included because of the topicality of the protocols. This extremely important issue, in which I admit to a personal involvement, will be a major focus of this year's conference and annual general meeting in Alice Springs. As such, publication of the commentary could not be held over, notwithstanding the otherwise exclusive nature of the theme issue. In any case, the commentary is of interest in the context of the theme issue because of the way it challenges the personal/corporate records conceptual framework upon which the issue is based and questions western notions of where the boundaries are drawn.

I trust readers will find this issue to be enjoyable and stimulating reading. I also trust that the momentum created by this issue is carried on through

future issues. Some topics that were under consideration for this issue, but which have been held over for future issues include: the application of the series system to the archival management of personal papers; the adoption of MARC-AMC/APPM for the sharing of descriptive information amongst archives in Australia; and the use of personal papers in the promotion of archival services. As I hope this issue demonstrates, there is no shortage of issues to exercise the minds of archivists with an interest in personal papers.

Before I sign off it would be very remiss of me if I did not thank the real editor of this issue, Michael Piggott. I am grateful to Michael, not only for giving me the opportunity to guest edit this theme issue and for recognising the importance of the topic, but also for all of his advice, encouragement and assistance in helping me bring the issue to fruition.

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April 1996

Endnotes

1. Peter Crush, 'Archives and Manuscripts', reproduced in *Debates and Discourses: Selected Australian Writings on Archival Theory 1951–990*, eds P. Biskup et al., ASA, Canberra, 1995, pp. 204–217.
2. Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (eds), *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years*, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, Clayton, Vic., 1994; and Sue McKemmish, 'Educating Recordkeeping Professionals for the 21st Century—issues and challenges' in *Redefining Records Management: Conference Papers of the 1995 Records Management Association of Australia 12th National Convention*, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 89–92.
3. Ironically, for a group that is often accused of ignoring the Jenkinsonian principles that supply the bedrock of archival thinking in this country, the eschewal of explicit appraisal policies by personal records archivists is one area where they remain close to the Jenkinsonian tradition that despises appraisal (or, as Jenkinson called it, selection). For more on Jenkinson, see below.
4. Graeme Powell, 'Archival Principles and the Treatment of Personal Papers', reproduced in P. Biskup et al., op. cit., pp. 132–142; and Chris Hurley, 'Personal Papers and the Treatment of Archival Principles', *ibid.*, pp. 143–158.
5. Hilary Jenkinson, 'The English Archivist: a new profession, being an inaugural lecture for a new course in archive administration delivered at the University of London, 14 October 1947', in H. Jenkinson, *Selected Writings*, Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1980, p. 255.
6. While I do not expect this argument to go uncontested, some readers may wonder at my impertinence in both invoking Jenkinson's physical and moral defence argument in relation to personal records and simultaneously disagreeing with one of Jenkinson's hallowed precepts. I make no apologies for this. While Jenkinson of course provides

our theoretical bedrock, we should not forget that he was only human, a human caught up in the paradigms of his age. While we must respect and honour his enduring legacy, we should not be blind to his blind spots or so uncritical in our reading as to not question some of his assumptions. Archival theory is not a museum piece preserved in aspic, but a living breathing organism that continually develops and responds to changing realities and world views. You may say that I cannot have it both ways, that I either take all of Jenkinson or none at all. To that I say nonsense! Providing we maintain internal coherence it is our right and duty to create an archival discipline that is relevant to today's needs, that treats its theoretical heritage with respect not as a straightjacket. We can have it both ways by continuously creating and recreating a discipline that takes the best from past thinking and combines it with the latest advances in current thinking.