

Editorial

In this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*, you will find articles that explore current issues, present research findings, provide case studies of best practice, and tell us more about ourselves.

As we all know, the recordkeeping profession in Australia and internationally is facing major challenges as it comes to terms with operating in a virtual world. One such challenge is the need to codify, ie specify and standardise, the full range of metadata that we might need to capture and manage in electronic networked environments in order to meet current and future recordkeeping requirements. Another is whether it is possible to specify a minimal record core – to identify a viable core set of record metadata – and, if so, whether this is a useful thing to do. There is also the question of how the specification of record metadata relates to broader international and national initiatives. These include the Dublin Core and United States Government Information Locator System (US GILS) efforts to develop common core sets of metadata to facilitate the discovery and delivery of document-like information objects in global networks. The question of our role in the broader information community's endeavours in this area is particularly topical as Australian Archives is currently taking a lead agency role in the development of an AusGILS metadata set. The Australian Government Information Locator System will operate at all three levels of government in Australia. The related metadata specification initiative will result in the identification of what is potentially a sub-set of a full record metadata specification – the purpose of this sub-set being to enable users to locate and access government information, including

records. It is envisaged that the AusGILS set will be attributable at both item and aggregate level. A further challenge relates to what Barbara Reed refers to as managing the meaning of record metadata over time, and thus ensuring that meaningful records are accessible into the future. In Australia, the series system exemplifies the way in which archival information systems have provided broad contextual knowledge bases that track changes in organisational structures, functions, activities and recordkeeping systems over time.

What will be the role of such systems in future, and will traditional archival descriptive practices still be relevant?

Two of the articles in this issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* address important aspects of these challenges – from very different perspectives. The article by Wendy Duff and Kent Haworth brings us up to date with international and North American efforts to standardise the archival descriptive metadata traditionally captured in archival information systems. The descriptive standards it references are based on the assumption that archival metadata will continue to be attributed to records retrospectively at the point when the records are transferred to archival custody, and that archival description proceeds:

from a description of collectivities of archival material to successively lower levels of description until the last level of description, the item.

Wendy and Kent also explore ideas about integrating current work in this area in Canada and the US into a ‘comprehensive model’ for archival description, a model which they suggest might be extended to include developments in the UK and Australia.

Barbara Reed’s article raises critical questions about how we should be capturing and managing the metadata associated with current recordkeeping processes in order to maintain records in their context through time in complex and rapidly changing environments. She speculates that if we see records as ‘passive objects to be described retrospectively’, we will take a very different approach to specifying the metadata we need to manage them than if we see them as ‘active participants

in business processes and technologies'. Barbara challenges the feasibility of recent suggestions that we could derive a viable core of record metadata from the common elements in existing models and specifications. Her preliminary analysis of the overlap between the metadata specified in the University of Pittsburgh and University of British Columbia projects, and the Australian Records Management Standard, suggests that it would essentially enable the description of the record as a passive object. Barbara goes on to outline the enormous challenges involved in managing meaning through time, focusing on issues associated with complex and inter-related cultural, functional and structural changes in organisations. Her conclusion is that it is critical to adopt an active approach to specifying, attributing and managing the metadata associated with records and recordkeeping processes, and to take into account the contingent nature of recordkeeping activities.

The articles by Livia Iacovino and by Kit Grady, Donna McRostie and Sophie Papadopoulos relate to the findings of two significant research projects. Kit, Donna and Sophie report on research undertaken at the University of Melbourne into the recordkeeping requirements of the research process. The outcome of the project was a set of guidelines relating to the capture, management and disposal of research records and data. Livia's article is based on her Masters thesis, which explored the relationship between recordkeeping and the law in order to identify what legal knowledge and skills records managers and archivists require. Livia's thesis went on to develop a legal studies curriculum designed to be integrated into educational programs for recordkeeping professionals. Her article focuses on reporting on this aspect of her research.

Catherine Robinson presented a fascinating case study of the Records Management Office of New South Wales' use of functional analysis as a tool in records control and disposal at the ASA Conference in Adelaide earlier this year. An edited version of her paper is included here. And finally, the results of the latest ASA membership survey, as collated and analysed by Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Bruce Smith and Jenni Davidson, are published in this issue. The survey provides an interesting and thought-provoking insight into the Australian archival community, at least insofar as it is represented in the membership of the ASA.

In my editorial in the May issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*, I raised a number of issues about the future direction of our journal and other ASA publications. These matters are currently under consideration by Council. In order that Council's deliberations can be informed by your views, our Managing Editor, Shauna Hicks, is developing a survey questionnaire which will be distributed in a forthcoming issue of *The Bulletin*. I would urge you to take some time to complete the questionnaire and have your say about how you would like to see *Archives and Manuscripts* and other ASA publications evolve as we move into the third millennium!

Sue McKemmish