Invisible Boundaries: a Paradigm Shift

Francesca Jury

Francesca Jury is the South Australian Museum Department of Anthropology Archivist. She is currently the Convenor of the Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group of the Australian Society of Archivists.

Much has been written about the recordkeeping practices of institutions - the reasons, the requirements and the results. However, as writers such as McKemmish and Cunningham have suggested, personal recordkeeping and its contribution to a society's collective understanding of itself has not been addressed to the same extent. This article takes as its case study the recordkeeping practices of scientist Norman Barnett Tindale, investigating the factors that influenced Tindale's work and the records he kept whilst undertaking that work.

Several writers have recently suggested that further research is required into factors that influence personal recordkeeping. Both McKemmish and Cunningham agree that investigation of 'socio-historical evidence'[1] or 'societal warrants for historical recordkeeping'[2] is warranted. McKemmish also emphasises the importance of personality, in particular the traits of 'good recordkeepers, who are moved to make and keep records in such a way that they come to form a personal archive.'[3] These two factors invite further consideration, but as complementary, rather than opposed, forces in making personal archives. Personality is, after all, partially socially determined. *A Dictionary of Psychology* defines personality as:

> the integrated and dynamic organisation of the physical, mental, moral, and social qualities of the individual, as that manifests itself to other people, in the give and take of social [life]; on further analysis it would appear in the main to comprise the natural and acquired impulses, and habits, interests, and complexes, the sentiments and ideals, the opinions and beliefs, as manifested in his relations with his social milieu.[4]

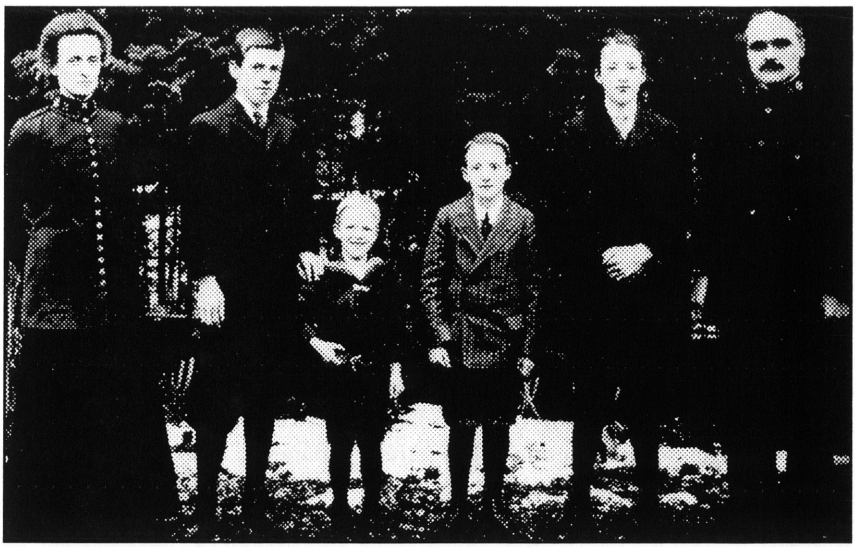
It is my assumption that who we are and how we do things sits within a broader social structure that encompasses political, legal, technological, religious and educational elements as well as family organisation.[5] The purpose of this article is to show that recordkeeping is influenced by all these factors. The archival collection of the late Norman Barnett Tindale will be our case study for this purpose.

Tindale

Norman Barnett Tindale was born in Perth on October 12, 1900, into a family of Salvationists. James Tindale, his father, moved the family to Tokyo, Japan, in 1907 to continue his work as an accountant with the Salvation Army. As a young boy, Tindale learnt German and French from the private school he attended. His 'street Japanese', learnt from playing with Japanese children, was later put to use deciphering Japanese military code in his capacity as RAAF Wing Commander in the Second World War. During his childhood, Tindale developed an interest in entomology, in particular *Lepidoptera* (moths and butterflies), that remained his 'original love' until his death on 19 November 1993.[6]

Norman Tindale holding a butterfly net, Tokyo 1915.

The Tindales departed Tokyo on 5 August 1915, arriving in Perth the following month. In February 1917 the family moved again, this time



Tindale family, Tokyo, 1915. L-R: Mary-Jane, Norman Barnett, Gordon Barnett, Clifton James, Murray Barnett, James Hepburn.

taking up residence in Adelaide. Tindale did not waste any time forming an association with the South Australian Museum Curator of Entomology, Arthur Lea. Tindale writes of Lea's desire 'to have someone who would look after Lepidoptera generally'[7] in his diary entry dated 21 February 1917. In May of the same year, Tindale secured a cadetship with the Public Library, determined to transfer to the South Australian Museum as soon as a position in entomology became available. Tindale writes in his diary dated 19 May 1918:

> While sitting at breakfast and reading (a la solitaire) I came across this newspaper article dealing with New Guinea and the PLM & AG of SA's trip [Tindale refers to a Public Library, Museum, and Art Gallery trip where Edgar Waite, the South Australian Museum Director, was sent to New Guinea to collect specimens] and had instantly a great desire to be one of the party and see again the country I desire to go to. Only time can tell whether my dreams and desires will come true.[8]

Tindale only had to wait a further six and a half months for his ambition to be realised. The department had received an additional £886,[9] allowing Lea to finally arrange for Tindale's transfer to the position of Entomologist's Assistant.

During Tindale's time with Lea, he learnt the importance of original order and provenance when asked to examine a collection prior to purchase.

> they were horrified to find Mrs Lower, dear lady, beginning an attempt at making the collection tidier. She had picked out those specimens with conspicuous labels, and those which had wings of one side mounted on cards, and had piled them in a little heap. Here were priceless type-specimens on their way to destruction. Careful handling soon put things right and Tindale was able to conclude that little of significance was lost. It was nevertheless a near tragedy and served to illustrate the desirability of leaving undisturbed any collections made by a departed expert if scientific data is to be preserved, and especially if they are to be offered to a Museum.[10]

In 1921, the opportunity arose to combine Tindale's interest in entomology with ethnography, when he requested one years' leave of absence to assist the Church Missionary Society of Australia and Tasmania as an honorary member on the Groote Eylandt trip, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. He also planned to study and collect natural history specimens on the South Australian Museum's behalf.[11] Lea supported the application by stressing that the island and its adjacent localities had not been collected upon by any zoologist or botanist since the time of Flinders. Further, he stated, 'the ethnological objects should also be of exceptional interest as there is not one from the Island in any museum'.[12] Having convinced the South Australian Museum Board of the importance of the expedition, Tindale was given £50 in advance for specimen purchase.[13]

As preparation for the field trip, Tindale was sent to Baldwin Spencer at the University of Melbourne for instruction on how to collect anthropological data. Showing Tindale the *Geographic II* spelling used for transcribing Aboriginal vocabularies,[14] Spencer also advised him:

> never go to bed at night before entering the key data of the day, even if I had to write the following day about corrections which should be made. I learned to write on the even numbered page of my journal, being careful to indicate date and place, leaving the odd-numbered side for entering data on photographs, making sketches, adding later comments and additions. In later years I learned to keep a rough running index which I tidied up and bound when my journal had extended to about 500 or more pages. It is useful also to put a title page on the journal so that in later years it can be quoted as a manuscript book.[15]

Of the 7,651 specimens and objects Tindale collected on Groote Eylandt, 487 were ethnographic.[16] The results were published in the *Records of the South Australian Museum*. On the 'great island', Tindale formed an association with Maroadunei, a Ngandi tribe songmaker from Arnhem Land. Tindale writes:

> It was he who introduced me to the idea of the existence of tribal boundaries, limits beyond which is dangerous to move without adequate recognition. His account of the tribespeople he had visited and his guidance in the matter of vocabulary changes enabled the writing of a paper containing data and a map of Southern Arnhem Land tribes. The editor to whom it was submitted refused to accept a map with finite boundaries, making the assertion then popularly believed, that aborigines roamed at will over the whole country-free wanderers. By a compromise the dotted lines that appear on the map were permitted to remain and the paper was accepted.[17]

At this point, 'Tindale realised that a new paradigm in ways of regarding and describing Aboriginal Australia was sorely needed'.[18] His work on tribal boundaries eventually became his major contribution to anthropology, culminating in the 1974 publication *Aboriginal tribes of Australia, their terrain, environmental controls, distribution, limits, and proper names.*

Tindale was officially appointed part time ethnologist in 1928. He continued his duties as assistant entomologist until he relinquished the position in 1933 to become a fulltime ethnologist.[19]

Creating 'Trustworthy Records'

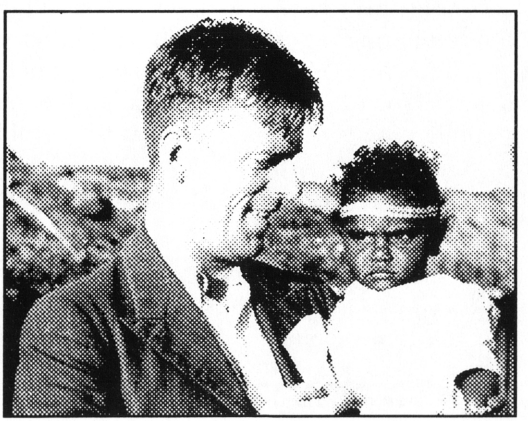
In *Harnessing the Power of Warrant,* Wendy Duff posits that society has endorsed procedures and requirements that instruct us on the creation, maintenance and use of records over time. These requirements or 'warrants' can be found in law, regulations, standards, best practice, custom and audit. Warrants and recordkeeping must be considered together in order to create 'trustworthy records'.[20] This applies equally to personal records and recordkeeping practices, as an examination of the records of Norman Tindale and his socio-political climate demonstrate.

In 1838 a despatch had been sent by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor Hindmarsh requesting that natural history specimens be sent back to the Museum of London.[21] The despatch was gazetted and printed in the *Colonial Register.* Three hundred copies of 'A Brief Code of Directions for Collectors of Natural History' were made available containing suggestions for collectors.[22] By 1856, legislation had created a Public Library, the South Australian Institute, and a Museum, in response to the British Museums' requests for 'colonial curiosities'.

At the turn of the century there was a growing concern by scientists that Aboriginal people would increasingly come into contact with Europeans, hence diluting or altering their 'natural' cultural state. In 1926 the Board for Anthropological Research was established at the Adelaide University, to

record ethnographic data including ceremonies, songs, initiations and social life. The extension of the north-south rail to Alice Springs in 1929, along with the 'advent of motor trucks',[23] created an urgency to collect as much data as possible before it was irretrievably 'spoiled' through contact.

Tindale participated in most of the Board for Anthropological Research expeditions until the organisation became defunct in the late 1930s. In order to record Aboriginal people, Tindale had to gain permission to enter missions which doubled as colonial administration distribution points for supplies, rations, education and medical aid. At that time missionaries were intent on 'civilising' the Aboriginal people, imposing western attitudes, work ethics and religion. In a sense there was a direct contradiction between Tindale's work and that of the missions. Tindale went to great lengths to capture the very traditions those missionaries were trying to stamp out.



Tindale holding a child from Monamona Mission Queensland, 1938.

The method of research commonly used by scientists of the time was empirical.[24] The intent was to collect and record data by observation and then use this observational data to develop models.

Tindale's recordkeeping techniques, both in the field and on his return, were developed by instruction from his peers and the use of standards at that time. In the field, Tindale recorded his observations in notebooks entitled 'rough notes'. Each evening, following Baldwin's advice, Tindale transcribed these to his expedition journals. Once the transcription was complete, lines were ruled meticulously through the pages, thereby creating a personal disposal authority. We know this because a few such pages were embedded within the supplementary papers thereby ensuring their survival.

During the expedition, records 'supplementary to the journal' were collected. This included maps, drawings, cinefilm, wax cylinders, vocabularies, genealogies, photographs, anthropometric and anthroposcopic data, blood and faunal samples and artefacts. Incoming mail was receipted and outgoing mail was copied. Related correspondence was stapled together. Each record was noted in the journals and cross-referenced.

Tindale saw the importance of authenticating information in the field, by recording the informant's name, date, kinship and genetic class (and verifying at a later date). For example, on an expedition to Mount Liebig in 1932, Tindale encountered a youth he had seen the year before on a previous expedition to Cockatoo Creek. Tindale enquired into his movements for the past year. The youth then proceeded to list the 331 places he had traversed since departing Cockatoo Creek.[24] Tindale accurately recorded each place, transcribing them later into International Phonetic Spelling. The importance of rendering the information comprehensible to a wider audience developed from Tindale's observation that some of his predecessors did not have an ear for sound. To compound the problem, the vocabulary was written in illegible nineteenth century script that could lead to typographical errors. Some errors were due to poor recording techniques. A consequence of this action led to the misrepresentation of 'tribes' in parliamentary reports.[25]

On his return from the field, Tindale formally bound the day journals to form a volume or volumes, depending on the size of the expedition. Incorporated into the newly bound volumes would be related items of interest (for example newspaper cuttings, annotations or additional notes sometimes spanning 60 years). As the collection grew, Tindale recognised the importance of creating a contents page and index, to enable access not just for himself but for future readers. Again, when rough indexes were fully transcribed, lines were drawn through the pages with a note indicating that they could now be disposed. Some journals were typed with one or two carbon copies. Some objects had whole ethnographic paragraphs of data written on them in fine black ink.

To the collection Tindale added desk journals and volumes containing notes and compilations. The desk journals included information gathered on overseas visits to look at ethnographic collections. Notes on archaeological sites are found in a bound compilation entitled 'Campsites and Implements', and notes on short trips in the 'General Trips' journal. As Tindale's interests continued to expand and diversify, he bound subject matter such as cosmology and mythology, ecology, place names, and botany

in ring back binders. He also embraced the latest technology such as cine-film and sound equipment to record data in the field.

Each expedition can be seen both as an entity on its own and as a contributor to the 1974 publication. Those not conversant with the Tindale record-keeping system could use the 1974 publication as the entry point. In 'Part II: Catalogue of Australian Aboriginal Tribes', the tribes are listed alphabetically according to his preferred spelling for geographic names and then by state.[26] If the tribe cannot be successfully located then the reader is directed to 'Part III: 'List of Alternatives, Variant Spellings, and Invalid Terms Associated with Australian Tribes'[27] that lists by alternative spelling, favoured term, and then by state. Here, Tindale has created the 'Aboriginal Tribal Name' thesaurus. Once the tribal name has been located, readers are directed to the section that lists each tribe alphabetically by state. Tindale provides the tribal name (both in *Geographic II* and phonetically), its location, coordinates (according to the nearest five minutes of the World Aeronautical Chart series ICAO 1:1,000,000), area, alternative names, and references. The reference points towards the relevant journal from which the information was collected along with any other reference, from which Tindale used to draw his conclusions. For those users who have only the area but not the name of the tribal group, Tindale provides a map that places each tribe (with names spelt in International Phonetics) in its geographical location.[28]

The Tindale Collection spans over 70 years and includes the records of his personal research as well as the records of this work in his official capacity in varying positions at the South Australian Museum and later at the University of California in Los Angeles and the University of Colorado. The fact that Tindale's work spilt into his personal time is endemic of those in scientific, research and academic institutions and problematic for record-keepers looking at records retrospectively.

Tindale recorded his field observations in his 'rough notebooks' by day, capturing them into his journals or his recordkeeping system by night. Tindale often made the collection available to legitimate researchers until his death. Thereafter access was and still continues to be obtained through the South Australian Museum. Tindale's system has withstood the test of time. He made and kept records with posterity in mind, perceiving the importance of his research for the future. He even managed to ensure its immortality, by bequeathing it to the South Australian Museum.

The Aboriginal People who Tindale recorded during his fieldwork were unable to give evidence under oath in court, as they were seen as 'untrust-

worthy'. The collection today, however, is invaluable for genealogical research and native title. With native title claims, an expert witness such as an anthropologist may be brought to the stand to 'express opinions upon relevant matters within the field of expertise'.[29] The expert witness may then refer to the Tindale Collection to support the claim in question. As part of the evidence, the judge or jury can consider Tindale's level of expertise; reliability and accuracy of information; method of recording data; qualifications; and the type of person the expert (in this case, Tindale) was, based on the available evidence. In all these areas, Tindale's work succeeds in being credible, weighty evidence.

What kind of a person was Tindale? Through his journals diaries we see the different facets of Tindale the person. In his early diaries, events such as his marriage and the birth of a child take as much precedence as passing an exam for his Bachelor of Science. Towards the end of Tindale's life, one can discern a preoccupation with 'getting his house in order'. This included ensuring the South Australian Museum's obligations in assuming custody of his collection after his death, and ensuring his estate would be in order. Tindale writes of his frustration with illness, not because of pain or suffering but rather because it was an impediment to productive work.

Both on expeditions and in his personal life Tindale was aware of audit accountability. Receipts for expenditure were kept and bundled together by expedition. Records were kept of his medical and household expenses even to the extent of Medicare number changes and Taxation File Numbers.

Tindale developed long-term friendships with people he met through his life journey. He was even initiated into a tribal community. People who had contact with Tindale attest to his professional behaviour at all times.

Cunningham's conclusion that 'despite what Jenkinson may have us believe, recordkeeping is always a partial and self-conscious activity'[30] is borne out in the work of a scholar such as Tindale. From the outset, Tindale was aware that his research was consciously created, maintained and kept over time, that he was writing for posterity, and his work reflected the broader social structure that he lived in. If Tindale was alive now, his tenacity would still be extant, but the social structure that encouraged empirical research on the premise that Aboriginal people would soon cease to exist would not.

Tindale set out to prove that Aboriginal People were not 'free wanderers' 'but were linked by culture, kinship, and language and were bound to the land ecologically and geographically'.[31] His empirical research took him to

almost every part of the continent. This, along with the premise that Aboriginal people would soon be extinct, precipitated Tindale's desire to collect as much data and as many specimens as possible. He achieved this by taking with him those in kindred and related areas of research on the many expeditions. He was considerably aided by his capacity to secure grants from often more than one institution.

Tindale's anthropological work culminated in the 1974 publication, *Aboriginal tribes of Australia, their terrain, environmental controls, distribution, limits, and proper names.* Even with this major publication and over 100 scientific papers, Tindale continued to research, revisit, and rewrite until he was in his late eighties. Despite his shift from entomology to ethnography in the workplace, his private interest in entomology never diminished. Tindale went on to become a world authority on the ghost moth, *Hepialidae,* publishing his results in scientific journals.

Both McKemmish and Cunningham have raised important questions related to socio-historical context and personality when considering personal recordkeeping. Just as Tindale set out to prove that Aboriginal people were bound to the land in ways invisible to the western eye, so the factors that make us recordkeepers are real but invisible. There is no divide between our personality and the social structure that shapes the way we keep records.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Bernadette Bean and Barbara Reed for their patience, encouragement and support and in addition Bernadette's ability to clarify my thoughts. Thanks also goes to Philip Manning who kindly offered his technological prowess to scan images for me and to the South Australian Museum Anthropology Archives for the access to the images.

Endnotes

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14. Dr P. Jones, 'Obituary, Norman B. Tindale, 12 October 1900 19 November 1993', *Records of the South Australian Museum,* 28(2), p. 160. The Geographic II Spelling was the convention of spelling used for the geographical names at the time.

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21. Hale, op cit, p. 2.

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24. See Tindale's journal *Expedition G. Expedition to Cockatoo Creek Central Australia.* August 6-27, 1931, South Australian Museum Department of Anthropology Archives.

25. See Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia,* chapter 11, 'Blunders, Excusable Errors, and Discarded Ideas', pp. 154-157.

26. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia,* p. 161.

27. ibid., p. 265.

28. ibid., p. 1. 'The phonetic transcription employed on the map is an adaption of the International Phonetic Alphabet arranged by a language committee at the University of Adelaide, with additions' by Tindale and Capell.

29. Butterworths *Concise Australian Legal Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 1998. See also Section 79 of the Commonwealth Evidence Act, 1995.

30. Cunningham, op. cit., p. 3.

31. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia.*