

Australian Society of Archivists Small Archives Survey 2000

Barbara van Bronswijk

Barbara van Bronswijk has been the archivist at two Western Australian independent schools, Wesley College, South Perth and Penrhos College, Como, since 1995. Previously she worked at the archives of the University of Western Australia, the University of WA Student Guild archives and on contract with the Public Records Office in Perth. She has been the Convenor of the Australian Society of Archivists' WA School Archives Special Interest Group for the past three years and a member of ASA's WA Branch Committee. Barbara joined the ASA Council in February 1999 and soon after was invited to form and convene a working party to investigate the needs of small institutional members of the Society.

The report which follows is based on the findings of the Small Archives Survey which was distributed to ASA members in February 2000 as part of the investigation by the Small Archives Working Party. Members responsible for a small archives were invited to respond on a self-selection basis. Sixty-four responses were received, almost 85 % of which represented the position of archives eligible for Category B institutional membership of the Society. Thirty-seven (58 %) of all responses were from school archives, thirteen (20 %) from religious institutions and the remaining fourteen (22 %) from the archives of businesses, charities, universities and government instrumentalities.

Introduction

The Small Archives Working Party was established by the ASA Council in 1999 under the guidance of Barbara van Bronswijk. Other members, invited to represent the various diverse small archives sectors, were Kylie Percival (university archives), Sarah O'Neill (schools), John Nimmo (religious institutions), Peggy Kennedy (business archives) and Tracy Bradford (local

government). Following limited response to the release of a discussion paper, and because of the dearth of statistics on small archives, the working party decided to circulate a survey to collect information of a specific nature.

The purpose of the survey was to:

- develop a profile of small archives and their staff;
- seek advice about their needs and expectations;
- establish whether the foreshadowed winding up of the Australian Council of Archives would result in any detrimental effect on small archives; and
- provide the Small Archives Working Party with data to be used to develop strategies by which the ASA can address issues pertinent to smaller archives.

Survey forms were distributed with the *Bulletin* in February 2000 and most responses were received by April 2000, collated, and the emerging issues discussed at the April Council meeting. Further responses were accepted until July when Council approved a range of actions designed to assist small archives. These were announced in the August 2000 *Bulletin*. The tabulated responses to the survey are in Appendix 1.

During the course of the Working Party's inquiries it had become obvious that there were a number of other formal and semi-formal organisations representing the interests of small archives, one of which is the Association of Catholic Archivists (Victoria). In May they agreed to distribute a slightly amended survey form to their 130 members. Results of that supplementary survey are dealt with separately at the end of this report (Appendix 2). Figures quoted in the abstract and the main body of the report do not include responses received from that supplementary mailing.

Response rates

The overall response rate was positive with 64 surveys returned, representing the position in 64 self-described small archives linked to the Society either directly through institutional membership or through the personal membership of the archivist in charge. Of the 64 responses there were 34 institutional members, 39 personal members (16 professional and 23 associate) and 9 instances where both institutional and personal memberships exist within the same archives. The responses have been categorised into three sectors – school archives, religious institutions, and 'others', a composite of businesses, charities, universities and government instrumentalities.

Question 2 (type of archives) demonstrates the predominance of responses from schools (58%) and religious institutions (20%), all Category B eligible institutions. To be eligible for Category B membership of the Society (with a concessional membership subscription fee), institutions must be schools, religious institutions, historical societies or similar voluntary societies. If the responses in the composite group are further divided into business, government, or university archives (10) and charities or community (4) it becomes apparent that 85% of all responses originate from Category B or potential Category B archives. The low response rate from Category A type archives suggests either there are few small Category A archives or that they do not perceive themselves as 'small', possibly because they operate as part of large organisations.

In 1999/2000, of the 170 institutional members of the ASA, 108 were in Category B. The table below indicates that the response rates for the various sectors are generally consistent with what could be expected from the analysis of the membership. Responses from the schools sector may have been reduced by the timing of the survey which followed a relatively recent survey conducted by the National School Archives Special Interest Group.

Responses from Category B archives, by sector

Sector	No. of responses	Category B members
Schools	37	84
Religious organisations	13	17
Charity/community	4	7
TOTAL	54	108

The typical small archives

It emerged from the survey that the typical small archives is one within an independent school. It will be managed by a part-time archivist who will work alone and be expected to accept responsibility for all aspects of the operation of the archives. This archivist is likely to hold a university degree to which will have been added on-the-job training during a period of six or more years of working in archives.

Employment in small archives

Questions 3–7 sought information about the number and status of archivists employed in small archives. Here there were quite striking contrasts with the results of the general membership survey conducted in 1996 (see *Archives and*

Manuscripts, vol. 25, no. 2, November 1997) where, for example, only 20% of respondents worked alone compared with 64% in the current survey. This result highlights the particular importance of the ASA as a facilitator of professional interaction. On the question of employment status, 56% of the respondents to the general ASA membership survey were full-time employees compared with only 31% in small archives. Conversely, in small archives there are proportionately more part-time employees (42% compared with 17% in the general membership) and volunteers (22% compared with only 8% of the general membership). Within the small archives there are variations in employment patterns, for example the highest incidence of part-time employment is in school archives, 60% of all school archivists.

Access to technology

Questions 8–11 sought to ascertain the level of use of technology for communication and information exchange. Use of computers in small archives has increased steadily in recent years, resulting in improved access to email, the Internet and listservs. 84% of respondents have email access, 89% to the Internet. These percentages include those relying on computers in their homes but this is set to decrease, several respondents indicating that work access was likely in the near future. The Aus-archivists listserv is less well utilised, with only 39% of respondents being subscribed and considerable reservation expressed about using the list. Some respondents indicated no knowledge of the list which suggests there is room for greater promotion of this service to members.

Archival training and continuing professional development

Question 6 established that almost half of all respondents hold a tertiary qualification. Frequently they have undertaken on-the-job training as a supplement to tertiary education or upon completion of a short course. Most use publications, particularly *Practical Archivist* and the ASA's *Bulletin* and *Archives and Manuscripts* as a way of keeping up-to-date with current issues. Some respondents expressed concern at their lack of training and perceived inability to meet the expectations of their employers. The responses to questions 13 (more publications) and 16 (expectations of a professional association) emphasise the desire on the part of many respondents for increased professional development opportunities although question 18 indicates that only 11% receive institutional support to attend conferences and 17% for workshops. This suggests that the cost of such activities will be critical as many will have to personally fund their professional development.

ASA membership and involvement

Section 2 sought information about association and interaction with the ASA, either through personal or institutional membership. The results indicate 73 memberships between the 64 respondents, and slightly more personal than institutional members. 25% of respondents are actively involved in Special Interest Group activities and acknowledge the value of meetings and networking with kindred archivists as the primary advantage of membership. Involvement at Branch level is low.

Question 21 asked specifically about attitudes to the rule which precludes institutional members from voting. The results indicate little call for change, although many expect the Society to adopt an active advocacy role on behalf of small institutional archives and would like Council to consult more widely with them on matters of relevance.

ACA membership

Questions 24–26 were designed to ascertain if closure of the Australian Council of Archives would have any detrimental effect on small archives. Although three respondents recognised the potential value of an organisation such as the ACA the result was a definite 'no'.

Conclusion

Conducting the survey has been a worthwhile undertaking, and one which should be repeated at regular intervals of 3–4 years. It has provided quantitative data on which to base future decisions, where previously only anecdotal information was available, and it has provided a much welcomed and possibly overdue opportunity for the voice of those in small archives to be heard by the membership at large.

Appendix 1 – Survey responses

Section 1: General questions

1. Name (optional)
2. What type(s) of small archives do you represent (school, religious, business, etc)?

Sector	Responses	%
School	37	58%
Religious organisation	13	20%
Other*	14	22%
TOTAL	64	100%

* Business 5, Charity/community organisation 4, University 3, Government institution 2

3. In what capacity do you work for your organisation?

Sector	Volunteer	Employ F/T	Employ P/T	Contract	Other
School	5	9	22	1	0
Religious organisation	6	5	2	0	0
Other	3	6	3	1	1
TOTAL	14	20	27	2	1

4. Do you have other staff working in archives in your organisation?

Sector	Volunteers	Paid assistants	No others
School	3	4	30
Religious organisation	6	3	4
Other	2	5	7
TOTAL	11	12	41

5. How many years have you been working in archives?

Sector	0-2	3-5	6-10	11-20	20+
School	9	7	11	6	4
Religious organisation	0	5	4	2	2
Other	0	3	5	2	4
TOTAL	9	15	20	10	10

6. Do you have any archives/records training ?

Sector	University	Other tertiary	Short courses	On the job	Self-education
School	16	1	5	17	0
Religious organisation	4	0	4	8	2
Other	9	1	5	3	0
TOTAL	29	2	14	28	2

Comment

Several respondents indicated a combination of on-the-job training allied with either a degree or short courses. Because the survey did not ask respondents to specify their degree it was not possible to ascertain how many were primarily Archives and Records Management.

7. Under the terms of your engagement, do you have responsibilities other than in archives and records management?

Sector	Yes	No
School	15	22
Religious organisation	2	11
Other	6	8
TOTAL	23	41

Comment

64% of respondents have no specified duties, other than in archives and records management. However a number commented that, irrespective, they are still expected to help out in a wide range of areas. School archivists were most likely to have other duties, including library (6), displays (3), teaching (2), school publications (3), research (2) and IT support. Archivists in the 'Other' category cited duties as librarian (3), museum administration, webmaster/IT, and oral history. Archivists in religious organisations rarely reported other duties.

8. Do you have email access?

Sector	Home only	Work only	Home & work	No access
School	5	13	14	5(14%)
Religious organisation	1	4	3	5(38%)
Other	2	6	6	0 (0%)
TOTAL	8	23	23	10(16%)

Comment

Fifty-four of those who responded (84%) have some email access, 72% of them at work. Religious organisations are noticeably less well served in all aspects of access to technology.

9. Are you subscribed to the Aus-archivists listserv?

Sector	Yes	No
School	13	24(65%)
Religious organisation	3	10(77%)
Other	9	5(36%)
TOTAL	25	39(61%)

Comment

Only 39% subscribe to Aus-archivist, significantly less than the take-up rate for email and the Internet.

10. Would you contribute more to a listserv specifically for small archives?

Sector	Yes	No
School	16	12
Religious organisation	3	4
Other	3	8
TOTAL	22	24

Comment

Eighteen respondents did not answer this question, possibly reflecting a lack of familiarity with list-servs generally. A number of respondents exhibited the view that Aus-archivist is for 'big picture' issues and therefore irrelevant to their needs. Others felt intimidated by airing what they thought others may see as trivial concerns, and several indicated they were unaware of Aus-archivist. The majority of those already using Aus-archivist were supportive of a single list rather than creating a separate one for the use of small archives.

11. Do you have Internet access?

Sector	Home only	Work only	Home & work	No access
School	6	14	15	2 (5%)
Religious organisation	2	2	4	5(38%)
Other	3	6	5	0 (0 %)
TOTAL	11	22	24	7(11%)

Comment

In total 57 (89%) have Internet access of some kind, 72% at work.

12. Which ASA publications have you found relevant to your work?

Publication	Responses
<i>Practical Archivist</i> *	28
<i>Archives & Manuscripts</i>	22
<i>Bulletin</i>	21
<i>Keeping Archives</i>	16
Special Interest Group/Branch news	10
Directory	2
Handbook	2
Conference papers	1

**Practical Archivist* is wholly owned and published by Joanne Birkl and Anne Cooke and distributed to ASA members.

Comment

Ten respondents did not list any titles. The list above was collated from the remaining 54 surveys meaning an average of nearly two publications per respondent. Many commented favourably on the practicality and accessibility of *Practical Archivist*.

13. Would you benefit from publications or manuals which specifically dealt with small archives?

Yes	No	No response
54	3	7

Comment

Respondents were asked to suggest titles and contents. There was overwhelming support for practical handbooks, guides and case studies and a

suggestion that an online bibliography of archival texts, websites, suppliers, grants etc. could be a useful tool. The most requested topics were:

Suggested topics	Responses
Inexpensive preservation, manual of ideas	6
Guides to legal issues, series system, disposal schedules	6
Guide to computer software selection	3

Other suggestions:

- handbook of typical problems and solutions;
- archives management – collection development, budgets, time management, using volunteers;
- promoting your archives, fundraising and applying for grants;
- establishing databases;
- storage ideas, catering for a diverse collection;
- archiving electronic records;
- preservation and storage of photos; and
- cost-effective archiving – tips and suggestions.

14. What do you perceive to be the major professional issue for small archives?

Major professional issues	Responses
Funding (sources, lack of)	13
Difficulties with the management of the organisation (lack of appreciation of archives work and principles, attitude to the archives, lack of recognition)	12
Working in isolation	6
Preservation of the collection	5
Recordkeeping issues, eg retention and disposal, legislative/legal compliance, privacy, access	12
Lack of training, but an expectation by management of professionalism, accountability, and expertise in all aspects of archives	8
Limited access to adequate professional development	4
Lack of adequate resources (space, storage, time, staff)	3

Section 2: Australian Society of Archivists membership

15. Are you a personal member of the ASA?

Sector	Yes/Associate	Yes/Professional	No
School	12	10	15
Religious organisation	6	1	6
Other	5	5	4
TOTAL	23	16	25

(a) If yes, what do you perceive as the primary advantages of membership?

Primary advantages of membership	Responses
Meeting, keeping in touch, sharing ideas, networking, professional support	15
Receipt of publications, professional literature	8
Access to workshops and conferences	4
Membership of Special Interest Group	2
A feeling of belonging	5

(b) If no, please indicate why you haven't sought personal membership

Reasons for non-membership	Responses
Financial/cost	5
Feel not qualified, no formal training, don't fit the categories	6
Organisation is institutional member	7
Volunteer/retiree	2

Comment

Some respondents demonstrated the misconception that one must be 'qualified' to be a member of the ASA.

16. What are your membership expectations of a professional association like the ASA?

Membership expectations	Responses
Dissemination of information and advice	18
Provide support network and a forum for discussion	15
Organise and provide professional development and training opportunities	17
Advocacy role, set professional standards and lobby for acceptance	7
Representation and promotion of the profession	4
Publications	5

17. Have you been involved in the organisation of the ASA?

Special Interest Group	Branch	Council	No
17	6	1	40

18. Does your employer institution support your professional activities in any way?

Yes	No	No comment
29	14	21

Specify the type of support

Institutional support	Responses
Pays my subscription	4
Pays for workshops	11
Pays for conference	7
Flexibility/time off for meetings	11
Hosts meetings/allows photocopying etc	3
Purchases publications	2

19. Do you think your employer would support you if you were more active in the ASA?

Yes	No	Not sure
17	23	24

20. Is your archives an institutional member of the ASA?

Sector	Yes	No
School	23	13
Religious organisation	6	7
Other	5	9
TOTAL	34	29

(a) If yes, what do you perceive are the primary advantages for institutional members?

Advantages of institutional membership	Responses
Meetings/networking	6
Membership continuity	4
Access to professional development	3
Exposure to new ideas/keeping up-to-date	11
Circulation of archives publications	8
Access to ASA website/listserv	2
Enhances the status/recognition of the archives	3

Comment

One respondent noted that the extent of any advantage depends on the incumbent archivist.

(b) If no, why doesn't your archives have institutional membership?

Reasons for non-institutional membership	Responses
No need/archivist is personal member	13
Cost/low priority within the overall organisation	7
Archives is not big enough	2
Australian Council of Archives is more appropriate	1

21. The Rules of the ASA determine that while nominated representatives of institutional members may vote at Branch and Special Interest Group meetings, at General Meetings of the Society they shall only vote on the setting of subscription fees. Does the restriction on voting rights for institutional members cause you concern?

Yes	No	No comment
7	40	17

Comment

Few offered any explanation other than three who felt it was 'undemocratic' as 'institutions are members too'. One member was vehemently opposed to the present restriction and suggested that institutional members should have one authorised representative with voting rights.

22. How could the ASA more effectively represent institutional members?**Comment**

Many opted not to answer this question, or missed the point about representation. Answers to Questions 22 and 23 overlapped as a consequence and should be read in conjunction. One response was cynical ('institutions are only members to save the archivist a personal membership') but most were constructive:

- have an institutional members session or meeting at each conference (in addition to the Special Interest Groups);
- ensure that at least one ASA Council member is from a non-COFSTA archive, ie not from the National Archives or a State or Territory archives who are members of the Council of Federal, State and Territory Archives;
- adopt an advocacy role and where necessary support small archives by addressing institutions directly;
- consult small archivists more frequently on relevant issues – either by survey or by appointing or seconding representatives to committees; and
- make Council more representative of the various sectors.

23. How could the ASA serve smaller archives better?

(Answers should be read in conjunction with Question 22.)

Nationally:

- seek ways to encourage authorities to institute more grants;
- provide greater leadership and encouragement to Special Interest Groups and improve communication;
- promote archives to the public at large;
- publish annually a list of all relevant courses and training opportunities;
- update *Keeping Archives* to include more on electronic records issues; and
- foster ties between archives, museums and libraries.

At State Branch level:

- hold after-hours meetings;
- actively seek out and encourage sole practitioners; and
- seek to ensure regular workshops, at least one per year in each state.

What issues would you like addressed by state-based workshops?

- practical management issues – time management, budgets, grant applications;
- impact of electronic records and information technology on small organisations;
- entry-level workshop on archives principles;
- specialist topics – conservation, imaging, displays;
- use of databases in the management of small archives;
- introduction to new legislation and laws (eg privacy) and the implications for archives and their institutions;
- repository design and management, storage facilities; and
- introduction to software for recordkeeping.

At a Special Interest Group level:

- encourage volunteers with an affordable 'subscriber-only' membership which would only cover postage of notices of Special Interest Group meetings and minor expenses but which would keep them in the network.

Section 3: Australian Council of Archives membership

24. Is your archives a member of the Australian Council of Archives?

Yes	No
3	60

(a) If yes, what do you perceive as the primary advantages of membership?

Only one comment, on the value of the archival statistics.

(b) If no, why doesn't your archives have ACA membership?

Reasons for non-ACA membership	Responses
This archives is too small, irrelevant to ACA activities	8
Don't know about ACA/never been solicited	8
Cost – it duplicates ASA functions	7
No perceived need	5

25. What are your membership expectations of an industry body like the ACA?

This question was ignored, possibly considered irrelevant as most are not members.

26. Would the possible closure of the ACA adversely affect your archives?

Yes	No	No response
3	42	19

Comment

The three ACA members (identified by Question 24) replied 'no' to this question.

Explain how:

- No one (archive) is an island – the presence of another archives body is good for all archives; and
- ACA is a point of reference and representation for institutional archives.

Section 4: Membership of other organisations**27. Are you a personal member of any other archives, records, museum or library organisation?**

Yes	No
38	26

Specify other memberships

Other personal memberships	Responses
Records Management Association of Australia	8
Australian Libraries and Information Association	6
Museums Australia	7
Association of Catholic Archives (Victoria)	4
Archivists of Religious Institutions	2
Mercy Archivists Group	2
Independent & Catholic Schools (South Australia)	2
State Library Association of New South Wales	2
Various historical societies & National Trust	8
Oral History Association	4
Professional Historians & Researchers	2

28. Is your archives a member of any other archives, records, museum or library organisation?

Yes	No
17	47

Specify other memberships

Other institutional memberships	Responses
Museums Australia	9
Arts Libraries Society, Australia and New Zealand	2
Association of Catholic Archives (Victoria)	4
Oral History Association	3
Historical societies & National Trust	2

Comment

Fifteen different associations and societies were mentioned in Questions 27 and 28 combined.

Appendix 2 – Survey of Catholic Archivists

The preliminary inquiry established the existence of a number of small organisational groups which have been formed to support small archives. Possibly the largest, with 130 members, is the Association of Catholic Archivists (Victoria) which was founded in 1982 and has members in several states. By mailing to the members of this Association it was hoped to identify ways in which the ASA could work constructively with this and other groups.

Seventeen Association of Catholic Archivists (Victoria) members responded to the supplementary mailing representing 13 school archives, three religious institutions and one catholic education office. In addition to these 17, eight of the respondents from the main survey were Association of Catholic Archivists (Victoria) members. Of the 17 responses to the second mailing there were six who were ASA members who had not previously replied, making an overall total of 14 respondents out of 81 (17%) who are both ASA and Association of Catholic Archivists members.

In most respects the responses from the second mailing mirror those of the main survey tabulated above. Noteworthy variation occurred in response to the following questions. Comparisons with the results from the original survey are given in brackets.

Question 3 – Terms of employment

There are fewer respondents in full-time employment in Catholic archives than in small archives generally (24% compared with 31% of respondents from the original survey) and conversely more volunteers.

Question 4 – Other staff

71% of respondents in the Catholic archives work alone (compared with 64% in the original survey).

Question 6 – Archives and records training

Only 18% of Catholic archivists hold a tertiary qualification (compared with 48% from the original survey).

Question 7 – Other duties

Half of all Catholic archivists listed other duties outside the archives (compared with 36%).

Questions 8–11 – Access to technology

Catholic archivists are, in all respects, less well provided for and consequently more insular in this age of online communication than the respondents to the original survey. 47% have no email (compared with 16%), 29% lack Internet access (compared with 11%) and only 18% subscribe to Aus-archivists (compared with 39%).

Questions 12–13 – ASA publications

35% acknowledged use of ASA publications, most popular being *Practical Archivist*. 60% expressed interest in publications for small archives.

Question 14 – Professional issues

These were very similar to those cited in the original survey – lack of resources, limited recognition within the institution of the value of the archives work, professional isolation, and the need to update skills and knowledge to keep pace with change.

Section 2 and 3

Many of these questions were irrelevant and not answered. With only one Australian Council of Archives member amongst the respondents its possible fate was inconsequential.

Comment

The ASA Council and the Working Party are grateful to the Association of Catholic Archivists (Victoria) for their cooperation in this project. There is opportunity for the two associations, and other groups representing small archives, to work together more closely in mutually beneficial ways. The ASA Council is looking to implement suggestions and develop closer ties within the wider archival community.