# Reviews

## Edited by Adrian Cunningham

**Baiba Berzins and Peter Loveday,** *A University of the Territory: The Northern Territory University and Preceding Institutions 1949–1999,* Northern Territory University, Darwin, 1999. xxi + 346pp. ISBN 1 876248 18 1. $33.00 + freight. Available from the NTU Bookshop, Northern Territory University NT 0909.

This is a good old-fashioned records-based institutional history which should leave archivists purring with satisfaction. In this respect it makes a welcome change from recent university histories by Poynter and Rasmussen (Melbourne) and O'Farrell (New South Wales) which declare themselves 'public' histories at the outset, and forego use of archival records in favour of publicly available documents (for the Melbourne book) or oral testimony (for its New South Wales counterpart). Indeed, Berzins and Loveday's book is doubly welcome because it manages to make effective use of all these sources.

At the outset Berzins and Loveday signal their interest in charting two themes. The first of these is the intergovernmental politics which prompted the Northern Territory government in 1987 to do what a New South Wales coalition government was unprepared to do in the Riverina in 1965–66, and proceed to establish a university college without federal government assistance. The second is the institutional development of the various higher education providers which amalgamated in 1989 to form the Northern Territory University: that is, the Darwin Institute of Technology and its precursors on one hand, and the Northern Territory University College on the other. In each case the authors insist their interest is in the interactions of the main players: the governments and the activists who clashed sharply during the political phases of the establishment campaigns, and the governing bodies, staff and students who shaped the character of the emergent institutions.

Some players operated across these boundaries: Berzins and Loveday ascribe especial importance to the initiatives of the present Chancellor, Nancy Giese, and a handful of other committed Territorians, who kept alive the vision of a university in the face of indifference and downright hostility at all levels of government. By contrast, the authors ascribe less agency or intention to executives in the various institutions, whom they see as more structurally constrained than these key external players. How much this perception reflects their own unease in the face of 'profound disagreement among

contemporaries' about the respective contributions of senior staff (p. xvii) is something that readers will need to decide for themselves. But one wonders whether the free and unfettered access which the authors enjoyed to the records of the institutions may not have proved a handicap when faced with the challenge of writing about recent events, and about players who not only are living, but have actually been responsible for commissioning their work.

The authors adopted a series of self-denying ordinances. They do not attempt characterisations of the living. They do not attempt profiles of the administrative styles of senior staff and they do not deal with 'internecine strife', whether of the personal kind among staff members or the institutional variety involving 'disputes over the continuation of courses of study and related enquiries' (p. xviii). What matters for them, as for the university itself, are the outcomes. This practical ruthlessness is all very well for the authors, but it makes for a dull, though worthy, book. One looks in vain for the feline grace of Poynter and Rasmussen as they lay bare the deficiencies in the University of Melbourne's recordkeeping, that obliged 'a small number of its ablest members [to produce for the Murray Committee] a persuasive submission in which elegance of expression concealed all but the largest lacunae' (p. 172). Also absent is the robust directness of Fred Alexander's *Campus at Crawley*, which so memorably retrieves from obscurity the University of Western Australia's foundation accountant, whose 'simple accountancy methods, like his filing, remained a good deal of a mystery, fully understood only by himself and by God' (pp. 52–3).

Instead of memorable vignettes of key players, one gets a handsomely produced, large format paperback volume, printed on coated paper, and lavishly illustrated with photographs, maps and diagrams. Some of the latter are more than a little perplexing: for instance, there is no explanation of Cyclone Tracy's 'surge zones' diagram on page 43, and the absence of scale in the map on page xxi will probably confuse all but Darwinians. The photographs, however, are more revealing than the text. Benign executives, smiling groups of staff and their supervisors, and glimpses of harmonious inter-racial cooperation among students, suggest that this is not just the way the University wishes to be seen by the world, but the way it actually wishes to be. Perhaps most fascinating of all is the frontispiece of Chancellor Giese, her smile neither concealing her determination nor disguising the personal costs of those who bear the brunt of long campaigns for regional social policy objectives. For her, at least, the authors of this history should have been prepared to take a few more risks.

Don Boadle
Charles Sturt University

**Greg Terrill,** *Secrecy and Openness: The Federal Government from Menzies to Whitlam and Beyond,* Melbourne University Press, 2000. 336pp. Paperback. ISBN 0 522 84856 7. $29.95.

This is an interesting and well-researched book. Its main purpose is to analyse the development of attitudes and responses to open government and access to information issues from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. For this period Terrill has used official records as well as published material and a wide range of recollections from those who were involved. As far as possible he has carried the story on to the present, but the 30-year access rule imposed by the *Archives Act* and the legal and financial limitations of using the *Freedom of Information Act* for substantial policy research mean that the full story cannot yet be told. I hope that one day he will do so.

Terrill sees the first cracks appearing in the Cold War secrecy of the Commonwealth government in the late 1960s. They were stimulated by the internal instability of the post-Menzies Coalition governments, the new Senate committee system, an increasing cynicism about government (particularly over Vietnam), the revival of the Australian Labor Party under Whitlam (who asked nearly 2500 questions in Parliament between 1969 and 1972), the development of television current affairs programs, and the advent of Freedom of Information legislation in the United States. Nevertheless when Whitlam became Prime Minister in 1972:

> Ministers could do much as they pleased with documents; the bureaucracy had a substantial role, if less power; and the public had minimal rights to know about the ways in which power was used over them. Documents were secret unless deemed otherwise by the government or, in theory but seldom in practice, by the courts (pp. 40–41).

The Whitlam government's contribution included initiating the drafting of the Freedom of Information and Archives Bills and the repeal of Regulation 34(b) of the *Public Service Act,* which forbade public servants from commenting on administrative issues. Even under Whitlam the FOI agenda was largely controlled by the bureaucracy and that control was maintained under his successors. When the FOI Act finally came into effect in 1982 it was a useful but scarcely a radical measure.

There was also a move to more open government because of the need to explain the many new initiatives which Whitlam and his ministers launched. In that brief but tumultuous period it seemed that all you needed to establish a new department was a bright idea and a handful of enthusiasts. Who now recalls the Department of the Media (1972–75), whose central administration bequeathed not a single record to the National Archives? Nevertheless public

servants have continued to talk more openly about a wider range of things, either on the record or off it, than they did in the 1960s.

So how far have we progressed towards openness in the 28 years that have passed since the Whitlam government was elected on a platform which included open government and FOI? Beyond the area of personal case transactions Terrill's verdict is not encouraging:

> Market models have replaced the pluralist enthusiasms in which the FOI Act was born, and government has withdrawn from many areas ... FOI simply covers less than it used to ... E-mail, like the telephone before it, has diminished the formal written record even though e-mail is subject to the Act. For those activities to which FOI continues to apply, the rise of business approaches in government have increased claims that information is 'commercial in confidence' ... Privacy, an important protection, has been taken up enthusiastically by those who would avoid releasing information (p. 122).

For those citizens who have the skills and equipment to interact with government electronically there is far more information available than ever before. Much of it is focused on facilitating individual client transactions, an initiative motivated not only by pure philanthropy but also by a desire to save money and to structure relationships in ways that suit the administrators. There is also a lot of what could be classified broadly as background information and propaganda. And in fairness to many agencies there is also a wealth of substantial material previously accessible at most only in capital city libraries and bookshops.

But those who want to know what really happened and where the bodies are buried would probably argue that Commonwealth websites are better at explaining 'how' than 'why'. For them the official record is paramount and the official records which explain the key decisions made by government within the last thirty years are little more accessible to the average citizen than they were under Menzies. Only a skilled and determined researcher prepared to risk unpredictable FOI charges has much prospect of prising them out of the relevant agency. The rest of us will probably have to wait for the 30-year rule to reveal how much the fragmented and undermanaged Commonwealth recordkeeping systems of the 1990s can tell us about the stories the websites dared not print.

Jim Stokes
National Archives of Australia

*Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 27, no. 2, November 1999, edited by Bruce Smith, 163pp. ISSN 0157-6895. Available from the Australian Society of Archivists Inc., PO Box 83, O'Connor ACT 2602.

Whatever else one can say about Bruce Smith's business archives theme issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*, one should immediately welcome its appearance and acknowledge his efforts in arranging it.

Let me explain. As many readers would know, the cause of business archives in Australia has been badly neglected over the past decade or more. Those who attended the Australian Society of Archivists 1999 Brisbane conference will recall Kathryn Dan and Bruce Smith's paper, 'Where have all the [Business] Archives gone?', with its depressing tale of decline of professional and institutional interest and funding. The threat in the late 1990s to the Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC) at the Australian National University was the galvanising issue and superficially the low point in this trend, but in fact the state of business archiving in Australia, when viewed nationally and systemically, is in a very, very bad way.

Optimists can rightly point to hopeful signs: the references to business recordkeeping in the National Scholarly Communications Forum's resolutions last year and in the Australian Society of Archivists/Records Management Association of Australia's April 2000 statement of joint purpose, the strong response to the NBAC situation, the growing collaboration between archivists and economic historians focused on extending their *Australian Business Records: An Archival Guide*, and the creation of a Business and Labour Special Interest Group. And now we may add this theme issue, whose editor has been central to this renewal and directly involved in these latter two initiatives as well as the International Council of Archives' Section of Business and Labour Archives.

Together, the five writers assembled cover most of the key issues faced by collecting and in-house business archivists. Several of them address historical questions: Leigh Swancott directly ('Origins and Development of the University of Melbourne Archives'), and Lesley Richmond ('Business Archives in Scotland...') and Fode and Fink ('Business Archives in Scandinavia') in passing. The needs of historical research and the drive and persistence of one or two individuals (usually historians) would seem to be almost a universal factor in archival development.

The inclusion of authors covering overseas experience leaves one in two minds; the negative dimension I'll return to below, but we can confirm various features of the local scene as common internationally. These are that very few businesses see any need to run their own archives; that they have no mandatory archival

and few records statutory responsibilities; that, as Karen Benedict's article shows, there is no uniform or ideal location for an in-house archives in the internal reporting structure; and that it is unusual to find businesses sharing the costs when their archival records are preserved by a collecting archives. This makes the financing of a full-time professional position by Rio Tinto at the University of Melbourne Archives and by the Scottish brewing industry at the Glasgow University Archives and Business Records Centre so exceptional.

In other respects the contrasts could not be starker. In the European countries represented here we learn of strong professional infrastructure and the central government archives providing funding support for business archives. In the 1990s in Scandinavia such support was legislatively sanctioned and extended to a business collecting role based to varying degrees on the power to demand the surrender of certain categories of records from businesses enjoying concessions or wholly public-owned.

In summary, the issue tells us a little of where we have been (Swancott), what is happening now (Judith Ellis's 'Consulting into Business Archives'), and via the overseas writing, what alternative arrangements are possible. If it has drawbacks, they arise from inevitable comparisons with James Fogarty's *American Archivist* business archives theme issue (Winter 1997) and the companion anthology edited by James O'Toole (*The Records of American Business*, Society of American Archivists, 1997). The resulting unfavourable conclusions are compounded on discovering that about half the Richmond piece repeats her *Janus* article (1997.1) and that Karen Benedict's elaborates (admittedly with illustrative US list postings) on points made in her chapter in O'Toole's volume. Finally, a number of the *A&M* articles suggest somewhat hasty drafting, perhaps reflecting the editor's difficulties in marshalling the final selection. I understand that at least two pieces he kept being promised beyond the usual deadline simply never arrived.

Bruce Smith's business archives theme issue stands as an important marker buoy showing we have begun to remedy one of the principal enduring blind spots in our efforts in documenting Australian society. If you doubt how much further we need to travel, think about the current state of business recordkeeping, think how widely and deeply the private sector affects our lives, note there are over 1.2 million Australian businesses, then read again our society's ultimate aim, 'The Archivist's Mission'.

Michael Piggott
University of Melbourne Archives

**National Archives of Australia,** *Administrative Functions Disposal Authority,* Canberra, 2000. 488pp. ISBN 0 642 33419 1. $42.95 + $5.00 postage and handling. Also available at *www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/disposal/authorities/GDA/AFDA/summary.html.*

The *Administrative Functions Disposal Authority* (AFDA), which is part of the National Archives' e-permanence suite of new recordkeeping products, is a result of a large research project that involved the analysis of each administrative function carried out in the Commonwealth government. The research involved examination of the legislative environment for these functions and consultation with stakeholders about recordkeeping requirements and risk analysis to assist with the development of records retention requirements. AFDA was developed using the methodologies of AS 4390-1996, *Records management,* and the functional structure is based on the business classification scheme of *Keyword AAA: A Thesaurus of General Terms,* for which the National Archives purchased a whole of government licence. AFDA covers the 17 common administrative functions based on the *Keyword AAA* business classification scheme and covers all levels of the Commonwealth government.

Herein lies one of the most obvious advantages of AFDA in that it provides a direct and extremely useful relationship between thesaurus terms and disposal actions. Those agencies using *Keyword AAA* to title their administrative records will find that undertaking records disposal using AFDA will be a much easier and more streamlined process.

The first thing that stuck me about AFDA, even before I looked at the substance, was how well laid out it is and how easy it is to access information in it. It is a large publication that isn't intimidating to use because of the excellent structure and use of clear fonts and substantial amounts of white space to separate sections and functions. Having a comprehensive administrative disposal authority in one document rather than the eight separate authorities it replaces provides agencies with an easy to use one-volume comprehensive disposal authority. In addition, the functional structure of AFDA will be less prone to the need for constant updating that the older general disposal authorities required.

The National Archives have included a suite of extremely useful information at the beginning of AFDA. This includes the methodology used, how AFDA relates to agency-specific disposal authorities, a glossary of terms, procedures for sentencing records and the business classification scheme. This information is often found in separate publications of other archives and records organisations, but its inclusion in AFDA provides easy-to-find contextual and procedural information. There are some very useful and easy to follow flow

charts that outline the records sentencing process and the disposal class breakdown.

I found the actual disposal classes in AFDA extremely easy to use. Each function has a functions scope note that provides the necessary descriptions of what is included under a particular function, as well as any exclusions such as where an agency might have a function as one of its core activities and should refer to their own specific disposal authority for advice.

Beneath the scope note for each function there is an activity description that relates to the function and with it provides a 'class heading' for each of the actual records disposal classes (or transactions) with entry number and barcode found beneath. There is ample cross-referencing throughout the publication. AFDA also contains a comprehensive but easy to use index. One feature I find particularly impressive is the separate section near the end of the publication, which lists the classes of records that are to be kept as national archives. Within this section each of the classes of records that are to be kept as national archives are classified according to their function. As these records will require different custody arrangements than for the temporary records, I am sure agencies will find it extremely useful to have them grouped under their own section.

I believe AFDA will be a welcome and popular recordkeeping tool for Commonwealth agencies. For those agencies using it in conjunction with *Keyword AAA* for titling records it will greatly assist in the improvement of quality in sentencing records and generally contribute to a more consistent, comprehensive way of classifying and disposing of Commonwealth records.

Tony Newton
State Records New South Wales

**Beyond the Screen: Capturing Corporate and Social Memory,** Australian Society of Archivists Conference held at the Dallas Brooks Convention Centre, Melbourne, 18–19 August 2000.

This conference offered a program exploring the role of archives in the cultural heritage landscape, including historians, librarians and museum professionals among the speakers as well as speakers from the recordkeeping profession. One omission from the wide range of speakers was noted by Jim Berg of the Koorie Heritage Trust, who welcomed delegates with the observation that it would have been good to see an Aboriginal speaker on a program dealing with issues of cultural heritage.

Opening keynote speaker Terry Cook is a familiar visitor to many Australian

recordkeepers. Cook outlined a potential schism within the archival profession between those who concentrate on archives as a heritage resource, as a source of memory, and those who focus on records as evidence, as tools of accountability. He argued that these two positions are a false dichotomy and need not be opposed. The records continuum model provides a framework for the reconciliation of evidence and memory, and a unified vision for the recordkeeping profession. Unfortunately, there was little engagement with the tension set out by Cook throughout the rest of the conference.

The session on collecting policies appeared to offer an opportunity to explore different understandings of the preservation of cultural heritage from the perspectives of archives, museums and libraries. Ross Gibbs offered an unashamedly oversimplified framework for comparing the nature of collecting by different types of institutions (though his deliberate focus on institutional archives may have left colleagues in collecting archives wondering where they were to be found in this view of the world). George McDonald of Museum Victoria and Catherine Harboe-Ree of the State Library of Victoria both talked of the challenges facing their institutions in the current environment, unfortunately without engaging with Gibbs' framework, or the question of whether and how museums and libraries differ from archives.

Janet McCalman provided an insight into the world of the archives user, and argued for the retention of records detailing individuals' lives. She showed how the ability to link records and recreate the stories of individuals has enabled historians to draw new conclusions, overturning interpretations based on analysis of discrete sets of records.

Liz Hallam Smith of the Public Record Office, London, explored the place of archives on the Internet, noting that archives, despite holding much of the data needed by family historians, have low visibility in cyberspace, and in many cases are being eclipsed by others providing decontextualised cultural heritage information. She challenged us to provide quality content online, using our understanding of context to deliver authoritative information. Evelyn Wareham described the relationship between Maori and the Crown in New Zealand, the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi for public recordkeeping, and explored how people of different cultures have different views of cultural heritage.

Two papers looked at the complementary question to that considered by Hallam Smith. As well as exploiting the Internet ourselves, we must consider how to maintain websites into the future. Tasmania's Our Digital Island project and the National Library's PANDORA initiative emerge from the library community, and treat websites as a form of publication. A view of websites as channels for transactions would have allowed the possible schism seen by Cook to be explored in relation to the web environment.

The great international debate provided light relief ('high farce' in the words of George Nichols) on the Saturday afternoon. Terry Cook's assessment of Paul Brunton's contribution: 'witty but irrelevant'. Brunton's defence: 'better to be witty and irrelevant than merely irrelevant'. Serious and relevant issues were discussed: the importance of heritage for identity in a global environment; heritage products as decontextualised entertainment; and the tension between privacy and memory, however the serious side of the debate was inevitably undermined by making Cook and Hallam Smith argue against the views they had expounded in their keynote presentations.

George Nichols spoke of the need for a strong national archival institution, and the responsibility such an institution has to provide broad professional leadership. In identifying challenges for the coming decade, he pointed to a cluster of issues around access in a broad sense: censorship, privacy, intellectual property rights, and freedom of information. Nichols also suggested the strength of the Australian recordkeeping profession is such that future conferences need not include international keynote speakers.

Overall, two disappointments remained. First, there was little engagement with Cook's central question of how to reconcile the 'cultural heritage' and 'evidential recordkeeping' strands within the profession. Rather we were largely presented with admittedly interesting accounts of how documentary collections are used in the cultural heritage sector. Second, and related, was an implication that archives serving cultural heritage purposes are those in the custody of dedicated institutions. Many records of interest to historians, genealogists and other cultural heritage users remain, however, under the control of their creators. With electronic networked access blurring the distinction of custody, the need for integrated regimes which encompass records wherever they are located appears stronger than ever.

John Roberts
National Archives of New Zealand