

Indigenous Records: How Far Have We Come in Bringing the History Back Home?

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Many records have been created that document the experiences of Indigenous people in Australia. While the majority of these records are written from a non-Indigenous perspective they can be invaluable for Indigenous people in locating information relating to their families and communities. This paper will look at the responses made by record-holding agencies throughout Australia to improve access to records for Indigenous people. It will provide an overview of the resources that have been created to locate records held in government, church and university archives, manuscript libraries and community keeping places that relate to the experiences of Indigenous people in the 20th century.

There has been an awakening throughout Australia over the past two decades as archivists have gained an increasing understanding of the importance of Indigenous people gaining access to historical records. Moreover, there is a growing recognition of the challenges that are faced by Indigenous people when accessing records, and the way that we as a profession have a duty in helping to overcome these challenges.

This paper provides a survey of the resources that have been produced to help people locate the many records documenting the experiences of Indigenous people in the 20th century. It will look at resources created by both

government and non-government agencies as well as developments that took place to increase awareness of the need for such resources within the archives profession. The survey looks at resources held in record-holding agencies such as government, church and university archives, manuscript libraries and community keeping places.

This article is by no means an exhaustive listing of records that document the experiences of Indigenous people. Rather, my aim here is to provide an overview of guides and sources of information widely available. I would like to apologise at the outset if I have neglected to include specific resources.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to those Indigenous people whose lives have been recorded in archives throughout Australia. I would also like to acknowledge those people that have survived the policies of 'Protection' and Assimilation, and still have the determination to do research in archives to take information back to their families and communities.

Introduction

Many records were created in the 20th century that document the experiences of Indigenous people throughout Australia. The nature of these records, although varying, ultimately comes from a non-Indigenous perspective. Often the records portray Indigenous people in a derogatory and offensive manner and the context in which many of the records were created was intrusive and racist. Many of the records document administrative systems of control and surveillance over the lives of Indigenous people. This includes, for example, reports from police, Protectors, local courts, Welfare Boards, stations, missions and church-run homes.

For many Indigenous people however, these records can be the only source of information that provides an understanding of their past. The information contained within the written record can be vital in the process of reconnecting family, re-establishing identity and gaining a better understanding of Indigenous histories. It can also provide evidence of past injustices resulting from actions such as removal of children and denial of access to wage entitlements and trust accounts. Furthermore, access to records may also provide assistance in Native Title claims. The written record becomes part of the jigsaw of understanding the past.

The needs of Indigenous people are increasingly being recognised and responded to by archivists around Australia. Conference papers and government inquiries have highlighted the need to create and review

resources, documenting the existence of Indigenous records. Indigenous people have a more active role in this work, and continue to participate in discussions about how things should move forward in the future.

Debate and discussions

The documentation of Indigenous records has been the result of a number of discussions, debates and inquiries. Academic critiques, articles, conference papers and government inquiries have all highlighted the need for more work to be done to provide information on what records exist and where they are held.

In 1989 Murri academic Henrietta Fourmile, published the paper, 'Who Owns the Past?: Aborigines as Captives of the Archives'. In this paper, Fourmile questioned the position of Indigenous people in terms of the collection and ownership of historical resources about Indigenous heritage. Some of the issues raised in the paper concerned the distribution of Aboriginal historical resources and problems associated with access to records. Many of the issues continue to be relevant and are still unresolved more than twelve years on. One of the concerns noted by Fourmile was the lack of knowledge of resources available. Fourmile wrote, 'Aboriginal people also remain widely ignorant of the existence of records and documents which concern them because the holding institutions have never informed them.'¹

In the same year, Indigenous issues arose in Louise Anemaat's article titled 'Documenting Secret/Sacred (Restricted) Aboriginal History' in the May edition of *Archives and Manuscripts*. Margaret Reid, from the Centre for Community and Personal Histories (Queensland), identified this article as perhaps the first response made in the Australian archives profession to Indigenous issues.² Anemaat's article related primarily to issues of access to Aboriginal secret/sacred material and the need for special access arrangements.

In 1991, Baiba Berzins contributed to the discussion of Indigenous resources in her article, 'Archivists and Aboriginal Records' in *Archives and Manuscripts*. Berzins raised a number of key issues relating to improvements in service delivery. The need to review access policies, create guides and finding aids, and conduct outreach work to communities were identified as the major areas of importance. In relation to the documentation of resources Berzins expressed concern over the lack of information flow to Indigenous communities. At the time, Berzins also noted concern that many of the guides that had been created were not published and so were not widely available outside of the particular institution that created them.³

Four papers were delivered at the 1999 Brisbane conference of the Australian Society of Archivists. Speakers included Kathy Frankland, Paul McPherson, Sonia Smallacombe and Loris Williams. The papers presented by Kathy Frankland and Paul McPherson concerned the position of archives in relation to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families. Significantly, at this conference, Indigenous perspectives were added to the discussion as Loris Williams and Sonia Smallacombe talked about their concerns and experiences in doing research in archives. In her discussion Smallacombe noted:

One of the concerns that Indigenous people have is the publications and guides to Indigenous-related records which are available in Commonwealth and State archives reading rooms. A majority of Indigenous people remain largely ignorant of the existence of these records and documents.⁴

All of these discussions acknowledged that Indigenous people need to be informed by record-holding agencies of the availability of records relating to themselves and their communities.

Government inquiries

There is no doubt that the journey that many Indigenous people take to access records relates to a much bigger picture. Research in the majority of cases is not merely undertaken as a hobby but is a process of healing and relates to health, well-being and social justice. Two major government inquiries have questioned Indigenous peoples' access to records in relation to specific social issues.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

The 1988 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) was established in response to the growing concern about the disproportionate number of Aboriginal deaths in custody. The Commission examined all deaths in custody that occurred in each State and Territory between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989 and the actions taken in relation to each death. The commission recognised that a high percentage of the deaths investigated had involved people who had been removed from their families as children. The Report stated:

It is clear that the earlier programs of separation of families, forced relocation and institutionalisation are a significant underlying issue. The cases heard by the Commission seem to indicate child separation had a profound impact on certain individuals' lives—almost half of those who died in custody had been removed from their parents.⁵

One of the specific recommendations resulting from the Royal Commission turned government attention to the need for Indigenous people to have access to records to locate information about families and communities. Recommendation 53 of the Royal Commission provided the impetus for State and Federal Governments to respond with appropriate action to facilitate and improve access to records.

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) established the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. The report *Bringing Them Home*, which was released in April 1997, recognised past policies of child removal and separation and the long-term effects on those removed, their families and their communities. Specific reference to archives and access to records was made in Chapter 16, 'Access to Personal and Family Records'.

The report noted, 'Little effort has been made to identify all files which are of relevance to Indigenous people affected by forcible removal.' Thus '[a]t this stage, no government is able to provide comprehensive information on which records still exist and may be relevant to people tracing their families'.⁶ The report also recognised the need for indexes and finding aids to be created to enhance access to records. In reference to guides already produced at the time of the inquiry, criticism was made that the finding aids were esoteric, not user-friendly to Indigenous communities and were made for a small educated elite. How much input had Indigenous communities, to which the records relate, had in the creation of guides and finding aids?

The report noted, 'Indigenous people require personal, family and community information for even more fundamental reasons, namely to assist them to recover from a past marked by gross violations of their human and community rights by governments.'⁷

In addition to making recommendations concerning the production of finding aids and indexes, the report recommended the establishment a Records Taskforce in each State and Territory. The taskforces were to be made up of representatives from government, church and other non-government record agencies. One of the main aims of the taskforces is to identify whether any church or other non-government record-holding agency should be assisted to preserve and index its records, and administer access. This is one particular area where gaps exist in the documentation of resources.

Responses from professional associations

Australian Society of Archivists (ASA)

The ASA adopted a *Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* at their Annual General Meeting held on 23 May 1996. The policy statement is a significant response from the archival profession concerning the importance of accessing records and the commitment by the profession to assist Indigenous people in this process:

Archives have the opportunity and a responsibility to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make maximum use of archival holdings and services and to facilitate Aboriginal access to records of their own cultural heritage and historical experience. To assist this process archives and archivists need to design and implement service environments, systems, routines, finding aids and promotional material which do not discomfort or embarrass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander users, but which make appropriate access to records a culturally-sensitive, welcoming and relatively stress-free experience for Aboriginal Australians.⁸

The ASA formed an Indigenous Issues Special Interest Group (SIG) at the 1996 Annual Conference. The SIG aims to encourage the sharing and dissemination of information between archivists working in both government and non-government archives around Australia concerning the availability of records relating to Indigenous people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network

In 1995 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN) developed the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*. The protocols are intended to be a guide to best practice for libraries, archives and collecting institutions concerning access to Indigenous-related material. The protocols include eleven specific points relating to issues such as the management of collections, the terminology used in creating resources, issues of repatriation, education and training of staff. The protocols state that libraries, archives and information services can contribute to a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by promoting 'awareness and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander related holdings, by such means as targeted guides, finding aids, tours and exhibitions'. ATSILIRN holds an annual conference, where information professionals and members of the community discuss new initiatives, issues and developments concerning resources.

Indigenous resources

Archivists, as custodians and caretakers of the records, were increasingly being called upon to be involved in discussions about the existence of records. Guides and finding aids needed to be produced to assist people with research. Knowledge of collections had to be disseminated beyond the research community into the hands of Indigenous communities. In the following pages the significant resources relating to Indigenous people held in record-holding agencies throughout Australia are described, including government, church and university archives, manuscript libraries and community keeping places.

A collective look at resources

Indigenous Australians: Records of National and Cultural Significance

Published in 1997, this report of the Cultural Ministers Council was produced as a guide which aimed to significantly improve access to Indigenous records held in institutions, both government and non-government, throughout Australia. The guide made the first important step in attempting to provide an Australia-wide approach to locating records relating to Indigenous people in the 20th century.

Significant resources were identified in the report including:

- the identification of guides and finding aids that already existed within archival institutions;
- the identification of significant collections of records not covered by existing guides; and
- the production of a report outlining the records held, their availability, level of description and identification of work required to make the records more easily accessible.

The guide is an initial step to answering the questions of what has survived, how much documentation exists relating to particular communities and their experiences, and where are the records located. The report, although a little outdated, identifies significant records held in Commonwealth, State and Territory archives and libraries, university archives, government museums, other government bodies holding records, and records held at land councils, historical societies and church archives. The report continues to be an important reference point to locate records and to make contact with agencies.

Archives of Australia website

The Internet is increasingly being utilised as a research tool to locate information on records held in different institutions. A central point to locate archival resources relating to Indigenous Australians can be found at the Archives of Australia website. The page aims to 'offer opportunities for the promotion and protection of collections of value to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.⁹ It offers links to archival institutions and pages of relevance to locate Indigenous resources, including:

- policies and relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and archives;
- recommendations relating to records by inquiries into issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and
- holdings of and guides to records relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The page includes links to major collections of records and the guides developed that document records held in the various collections. Many of the finding aids are available online, and if they are not, people are made aware of how to obtain access to the guides and records. The page helps to alleviate the problems associated with trying to locate information and to find out what exactly exists. The main links to resources, guides and collecting institutions available on the site include:

- *Indigenous Australians: Records of National and Cultural Significance* (referred to above);
- the *Register of Australian Archives and Manuscripts* (RAAM); and
- institutions such as the National Archives of Australia, the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, State Records New South Wales, State Records South Australia, the Northern Territory Archives Service, the Library and Information Service of Western Australia, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and the Anthropology Department of the University of Western Australia.

The site provides links to the *Register of Australian Archives and Manuscripts* (RAAM) which lists many records relating to Aboriginal people. Using the search facility on RAAM researchers can locate significant collections of records held in various record-holding agencies throughout Australia. In the

future it is hoped that as more resources are identified, they too will be added to the Archives of Australia website.

Government archives throughout Australia

National Archives of Australia

The National Archives of Australia holds many records relating to Indigenous people in offices throughout Australia, however the major series of records are held in Canberra, Melbourne and Darwin. Although the administration of Aboriginal affairs was primarily a State function up until the 1967 referendum, the National Archives still holds many significant records relating to Indigenous people. The most significant holdings relate to the Northern Territory and Victoria.

Records relating to Indigenous people in the Northern Territory date from 1911 up until self-government in 1978. The records relating to Indigenous people in Victoria are in the custody of National Archives as a result of the legislation enacted in Victoria in 1975 to transfer responsibility for Aboriginal affairs to the Commonwealth.

In 1993, the National Archives published the guide, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Commonwealth Records: A Guide to Records in the Australian Archives, ACT Regional Office*. The guide contains a detailed list of agencies that were involved in the creation of the records and follows with a detailed listing of records and an index to people, places and subjects mentioned. The records described in the guide date from the 1860s to the 1960s and relate primarily to the administration of Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory, however there is also information available about people in the States and of Aboriginal affairs in the States.

My Heart is Breaking, first published in 1993, is a joint guide to records about Aboriginal people in the Public Record Office of Victoria and the National Archives, Melbourne office. The first part of the guide lists the record series held relating to government administration and provides information on where to locate other sources of information on Victoria's Indigenous population. Part Two of the guide *Glimpses of the Past* includes excerpts taken from the records.

In 1996, the National Archives published the book, *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the removal of Aboriginal children of part descent in the Northern Territory*. The book accompanied the *Between Two Worlds* exhibition that travelled the country telling the stories of Indigenous people

affected by removal policies in the Northern Territory. As Rowena MacDonald, curator of the exhibition wrote:

While the documents encapsulate the views of white officialdom, the words and songs of former residents reflect some of the responses of those affected by the official policies. Where the government letters and reports state with sometimes shocking frankness the rationalisation for the policy of removal, the oral histories reveal its shattering impact on the lives of individual Aboriginal people.¹⁰

The National Archives also holds records relating to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). The guide, *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: The Royal Commission and its Records, 1987–1991* lists records created by the Royal Commission. The National Archives also produced a Fact Sheet to provide summary information on the records created by the Commission, and details of how to access the records.

The most recent work being done by the National Archives is a result of the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report. The National Archives received a grant of \$2 million over four years to index, copy and preserve relevant Commonwealth records relating to Indigenous people. Work on the *Bringing Them Home* name index has included the recruitment of staff for indexing in Canberra, Melbourne and Darwin. The project has involved the identification of over 10,000 files held in Canberra which need checking in case they include names of Indigenous people, and the identification of a list of series of files to be indexed in Melbourne and Darwin. To date 250,000 name entries have been added to the index. The name index includes names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people mentioned in the records and names of some non-Indigenous people who were associated with the administration of Aboriginal affairs (for example, missionaries, police and teachers), and the names of missions and institutions.

Other sources of information on records relating to Indigenous people include Fact Sheets on topics such as the Pastoral Industry in the Northern Territory, British Nuclear Tests at Maralinga, Albert Namatjira, the 1967 Referendum, and Bishop Francis Xavier Gsell who was a Mission Priest in the Northern Territory. The National Archives finding aid RecordSearch, and photographic database PhotoSearch, may also contain information relating to Indigenous resources, in particular administrative histories of the agencies involved in the creation of the records.

Public Record Office Victoria (PROV)

As mentioned previously, records created relating to Indigenous people in Victoria were transferred to the National Archives, following the decision by

the Victorian Government in 1975 to transfer the responsibility of Aboriginal affairs to the Commonwealth. Indigenous resources created in the period 1836 to 1859 are held at the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) and many records already deposited at the PROV remained there after the legislative change in 1975.

Records relating to Indigenous people in Victoria can also be found in other archival institutions. The guide *My Heart is Breaking*, includes references to these additional sources of material. They include resources held at State Records NSW; Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW; La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria; Museum of Victoria; Public Record Office London; and AIATSIS, Canberra. The guide also notes, 'The situation regarding Missionary organisations records in Victoria is unclear, with little information being currently available. Such records, if they still exist, would provide a significant body of additional information.'¹¹

Work currently being undertaken by the Victorian Koorie Records Taskforce may shed some light on the question of whether records have survived. The Taskforce plans to undertake an extensive program of state-wide consultations with the Victorian Koorie community about access to records and is also taking steps to contact record agencies to identify further Indigenous resources that may be useful for personal, family and community research.

State Records New South Wales (NSW)

In 1982 a special project was undertaken to create a guide to records relating to Indigenous people held at State Records. The inventory of records remained unpublished up until 1998 and was available only to clients who visited the reading room. An updated version of the inventory was produced in May 1998, titled *A Guide to NSW State Archives relating to Aboriginal People*.

The guide was published in response to the huge increase in interest in the previous decade to records relating to Aboriginal people. The guide lists the many records held by State Records which relate to Aboriginal people and the administration of Aboriginal affairs in NSW. The guide is divided into two parts. Part One is a list of records created and used by the Aborigines Protection Board, renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board from 1940, which was established in 1883 and held its last meeting in 1969. This was the main NSW Government agency which implemented and administered the legislation and policy impacting on Indigenous people throughout the state. There are many gaps in the records, in particular the series of correspondence files appear to have survived only for the years 1949–69. This is a major gap in the written record relating to Indigenous people in NSW. An index to the

surviving correspondence files of the Aborigines Welfare Board, 1949–69 was compiled in 1987 by Ken Brindle.

Part Two is a list of material created by other NSW Government agencies which contain significant mention of Indigenous people. This includes, for example, records of the Aboriginal Lands Trust, Commissioner of Crown Lands, Courts of Petty Sessions, Lands Department, School Education and the Supreme Court. It is, however, not an exhaustive list of resources. References to Indigenous people can be found throughout the records of various Government agencies and may be located by various guides, finding aids and indexes available at State Records.

State Records also produces *Archives in Brief* to assist people gain access to Indigenous records. *Archives in Brief* produced to date include NSW State Archives relating to Aboriginal People, Aborigines Welfare Board, Photographs – Aborigines Welfare Board, c1924–61, and Schools – Aboriginal Schools 1876–c1979.

The Department of Community Services (DOCS) in NSW produced a guide to records for children who had been separated from their families in 1998. *Connecting Kin: Guide to Records: A guide to help people separated from their families* greatly assists researchers looking at child separation, listing both government and private agencies that were involved in the care of children removed from their families. The guide provides an index to records created and provides contact details and steps necessary to gain access to records.

Centre for Community and Personal Histories, Queensland

The Centre for Community and Personal Histories, which is a section of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, was established to provide Indigenous people with access to the Department's historical records. The records which are held include social history cards, wage records, personal files and cards relating to such things as permits to reside, identity, removal, exemption, marriage and death.

The Centre has produced a number of guides and indexes to records which greatly assist access to Indigenous resources. Guides produced include *Records Guide: A Guide to Queensland Government Records Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Volume One, compiled by Kathryn Frankland, 1994. The guide provides administrative histories of agencies involved in the creation of records and lists series created up until December 1989. The guide lists and describes 149 series covering the majority of the 20th century, 1897 to 1987.

Records Guide: A Guide to Queensland Government Records Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Volume Two, lists and describes 235 series and includes descriptions of 13 head office series additional to those listed in Volume One. The series described date from c1898 to c1990 and relate primarily to the records created by the regional offices of the agencies responsible for the administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. It also provides a brief administrative history of missions and reserves in Queensland. An independent researcher, Paul Mackett, has produced over 130 index volumes to the government records listed in the guides held at the Centre for Community and Personal Histories.

Northern Territory Archives Service

Published in November 1996, the *Guide to Records Holdings relating to Aboriginal People*, includes listings of personal records, records of non-government organisations as well as records of government agencies in the Northern Territory. The guide itself is significant, in that it lists records created by both the administration of Aboriginal affairs by government and the interaction between Indigenous people and non-government organisations.

The first section relates primarily to a collection of records comprising personal papers, photographs, oral history interviews and memoirs. Records of non-government organisations include records of societies, clubs, associations, companies, churches, political parties, unions and non-government councils that have deposited records with the Northern Territory Archives Service. The records relating to Indigenous people in the Northern Territory include records deposited by the Australian Inland Mission Aerial Services, the Central Australian Museum, the Church Missionary Society of Australia, the North Australian Committee, the Daly River Community Development Association Incorporated, the Hooker Pastoral Company, Nungalinga College, the Royal Australian Historical Society and the Uniting Church of Australia.

The final section includes records created by the Northern Territory Government relating to Indigenous people. This part of the guide includes an alphabetical listing of agencies and record series created. The guide notes that unless an agency is stated to be 'Commonwealth' all agencies listed are either Northern Territory Government agencies created since self-government in 1978 or agencies whose title did not alter with the change from Commonwealth to Northern Territory administration.¹²

Western Australia

The Public Record Office of Western Australia website provides a number of references to Indigenous resources held as official government records. Key

resources for Aboriginal family history can be found within the records relating to Aboriginal affairs in the State. Overall the records document State control over the lives of Indigenous people in Western Australia from 1905 until citizenship rights were granted in the late 1960s.¹³

The main series of records, the General Files Series 1898–, forms part of over 10,000 files that have been created by successive departments, which now come under the administrative control of the Aboriginal Affairs Department. Indexes have been created to make these files more accessible. Indexes are available to personal names, missions and stations.

State Records, South Australia

The State Records Office of South Australia has developed a number of resources relating to Indigenous people.

The *Guide to Records Relating to Aboriginal People* consists of five volumes that document the South Australian Government's administration of Aboriginal affairs. The guide has in-depth item descriptions and listings to the many series of records. The guide, together with the item descriptions contained within it, aims to provide researchers with 'a resource that provides quick and easy access to records. For many people who have never researched primary resources, having indexes to records will significantly help to overcome any fears about research in the unfamiliar surrounds of an archive.'¹⁴ The five-volume set makes up the Aboriginal Resource Kit.

The Aboriginal Project Officer of State Records continues to work on an Aboriginal Name Index which will input names of Indigenous people mentioned in the records. The aim of the project is to input 100,000 entries of names of Indigenous people in South Australia.

Archives Office of Tasmania

The Archives Office of Tasmania has not produced a guide specifically relating to Indigenous resources. Tasmania appears to be unique, in that no specific government agency was established to carry out the administration of Aboriginal affairs as it operated under the pretence, or myth, that Indigenous people had in fact died out. This however, does not mean that records do not exist.

Records relating to Indigenous people in Tasmania can be found in the general series of records created by other government agencies, for example, the Office of the Colonial and Chief Secretary, the Lands Department, and the Education Department. Further information concerning access to these records can be obtained by contacting staff at the Archives Office of Tasmania.

Other Government record-holding agencies

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is Australia's leading collecting institution of resources relating to Indigenous people. The Institute library holds the world's most extensive collections of printed, audio, and visual material on areas relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Institute's archives contain invaluable collections of sound, film, video and pictorial material. AIATSIS also has a Family History Unit which provides advice on how to conduct genealogical research and access records held at AIATSIS and record agencies throughout Australia.

The AIATSIS Archives and Production Unit is responsible for maintaining the Audiovisual Archives. The Archives comprise over 600,000 photographic images, approximately 30,000 hours of recorded sounds, over 3 million feet of film footage, around 15,000 hours of film soundtrack and approximately 5,000 hours of video.¹⁵ The Institute is active in the collection of manuscripts, recordings and oral histories that are created and written from an Indigenous perspective.

The Family History Unit received funding as a result of the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report to assist Indigenous people in conducting historical research. The Unit aims to collect, promote and disseminate resources relating to Indigenous people throughout the country. It has produced an Aboriginal Biographical Index, which presently has around 54,000 entries. The AIATSIS website has links to archives throughout Australia and includes links to non-government resources relating to Indigenous people.

Access to the AIATSIS collection is through Mura, the online catalogue. The Mura catalogue includes the Aboriginal Biographical Index, Film and Video Archive, Pictorial Archive, Print Collections and Recorded Sound Archive.

ABC Archives

The ABC Archives include Document, Radio and Television Archives. Records in the custody of the ABC Archives are Commonwealth records which will be transferred to the National Archives of Australia when no longer required for current business. The ABC Document Archives holds documentary material relating to ABC programs. Although no specific guides have been created to these holdings some material may be of importance to Indigenous people. For example, the Document Archives include

transcriptions of a number of programs that were broadcast on ABC Radio. Indigenous content may also be located within the photographic collection of publicity files. The ABC Television Archives worked on a joint project with AIATSIS for a two-year period in 1991 and 1992 to identify television programs relating to Indigenous people. An unpublished index is available from the ABC Television Archives and information is also available on the ABC website. However, many programs are yet to be identified.

Other government institutions

The Australian War Memorial holds Commonwealth records relating to Indigenous people who were involved in the war and also a private collection of records. ScreenSound Australia, the National Film and Sound Archive, has produced a finding aid to Indigenous resources. The guide, *Recordings by Australian Indigenous Artists 1899 to 1988: A Guide to Commercially Issued Sound Records by Australian Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* was produced in cooperation with AIATSIS in 1999.

The New South Wales Parliamentary Archives has published a web version of *A Guide to New South Wales Parliamentary Archives relating to Aboriginal People*. The Archive holds records which have been tabled in NSW Parliament, as well as records of various Select Committees relating to Aboriginal People.¹⁶ Many other government institutions hold records relating to Indigenous people, however, the extent of these holdings has not been thoroughly assessed and information is not widely known or made available to the general public.

Libraries, museums and university archives

Libraries

The National Library of Australia received funding in response to the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report to establish an oral history project that will collect and preserve oral histories from Indigenous people and others that had been involved in the process of child removals. The project, which aims to be completed in June 2002, will become an invaluable resource that will document the experiences of Indigenous people in the 20th century. The Oral History Project team has encouraged a number of people to tell stories, including separated children, family members affected by separations, foster parents, administrators, missionaries, hospital workers and police. The National Library of Australia has a large collection of material relating to Indigenous people. The non-print material includes oral histories, manuscripts (most notably the papers of Neville Bonner, Charles Kevin Gilbert, Sally Morgan and Edward Koiki Mabo) and pictorial works.

The Indigenous Libraries Unit, State Library of Queensland has created a website devoted to Indigenous resources in Queensland. The site, 'Footprints before me – following the history of Family and Community' has details of records that are available for research. These include records of police, missions and reserves, land councils, station records and military records. The Unit itself holds copies of the Tindale genealogies and photographs that relate to communities in Queensland (see below, *Museums*).

The Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, holds many records relating to Indigenous people. There is no overall guide to the record holdings. The library has copies of the Tindale genealogies and photographs that relate to communities in New South Wales (see below, *Museums*). INFOKOORI, an index to Australian Indigenous information is available on the State Library website. The INFOKOORI database is an index to the *Koori Mail*, a national fortnightly newspaper published in Lismore, NSW. INFOKOORI also contains an index to biographical information from *Dawn* (1952–69), *New Dawn* (1970–75) and *Identity* (1971–82).

The Mortlock Library, State Library of South Australia, has produced information to assist people in their search to locate records in their collection. Family History Source Sheet No. 6, *Aboriginal Family History*, provides a list of published sources. The list includes the *Guide to Archival Records held in the Mortlock Library of South Australiana relating to Aboriginal People*, 1990. Private archives held at the Library include personal diaries, letters and journals of explorers, pastoralists and others, society records which include, for example, archives of the Aborigines' Friends' Association and the Aborigines Advancement League, and church records which may include records of missions, baptisms, marriages and burials. The Mortlock Library has also produced a guide to assist Indigenous people removed from their families in tracing the families, *Aboriginal Family History: Tracing the Families of the Stolen Generation at the State Library of South Australia*. Both guides are available on the State Library website.

Universities

Many university libraries have manuscript collections and archives relating to Indigenous people. Largely these collections are comprised of personal papers of academics working in the area of Indigenous studies, for example, anthropologists, linguists and ethnographers. They may also contain records deposited by community organisations, political pressure groups, stations, church groups and missions.

The University of Sydney Archives holds the records created by Professor Elkin, who worked extensively in the field of anthropology. A guide to the

personal archives of Professor A P Elkin is available on the University of Sydney Archives website.¹⁷ The Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University holds records on pastoral stations and employment of Indigenous people. The Archives has a card index to stations that have deposited their records with the university. It also holds a full set of the Australian Pastoral Directory which can be of great assistance for research. Access to information on stations is through the general catalogue of the Noel Butlin Archives.

The Berndt Museum of Anthropology, University of Western Australia has significant records relating to Indigenous people in the State. The Museum has an in-house database for manuscripts, photographs and objects that are held in the collection. No specific guides have been published relating to their collection. The Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide has records deposited by academics working at the University. Most notable of the collection are the papers of Daisy Bates. An in-house listing to records relating to Indigenous people was prepared in 1995 and specific reference to the collection can be located by consulting the library's catalogue system.

Guides and finding aids to significant collections held in university libraries and archives are still to be created. Many of the universities have in-house indexes, guides and inventories, however, to a large extent many remain unpublished. Access to information on records is often by keyword search on library or archive databases, where available, or by searching RAAM.

Museums

No doubt the vast majority of museums would hold archives or papers relating to Indigenous people. Collections have been identified throughout Australia; some are specific to the particular state that the museum is situated in, and others document work done by anthropologists that travelled through many communities around Australia.

The South Australia Museum has one of the most valuable collections of papers, created by Norman B Tindale. The Museum has published *A Guide to the Norman B Tindale Archives*, which provides descriptions of the various types of information that he had detailed as part of his work. The work of Tindale includes detailed genealogies of the various communities he travelled to, field notes, journals, photographs and diaries. As noted previously some of the State Libraries have been able to obtain copies of photographs and genealogies specific to communities in their State to assist Indigenous people gain access to records.

Other significant collections have been identified at the Australian Museum, Sydney, and the Museum of Victoria. The Museum of Victoria has produced

an information sheet highlighting the manuscripts and photographs held in their collection at the Museum. The Strelhow Research Centre in Alice Springs holds material collected by Professor TGH Strelhow in his work with Aboriginal communities of Central Australia. The material collected dates from between 1932 and 1978 and is of both a secular and sacred nature. The collection includes cultural objects, film, sound recordings, photographs, field diaries, genealogies, Aboriginal site maps, personal correspondence, dictionary material and newspaper cuttings.

Church archives

In 1999, the Catholic Church published *A Piece of the Story: National Directory of Records of Catholic Organisations Caring for Children Separated from Families*. Overall the guide:

presents a comprehensive directory of centres operated by organisations of the Church which have provided residential care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. With the desire to assist Indigenous people re-establish their family and community links and in a spirit of reconciliation, *A Piece of the Story* describes the personal records which are known to exist for people who resided at these centres. *A Piece of the Story* also describes the process for accessing those records.¹⁸

The directory is divided into each State and Territory and lists records created by each church centre alphabetically. The directory includes the title and description of the centre, the location and the church organization responsible for operating each centre. It also includes details of the years of operation of the centre, type of service, sex and age of residents and contact information to gain access to the records. Records cover the last 163 years of known Catholic Church involvement in the care of children across Australia.

In 1999 the Lutheran Church Archives in Adelaide, with assistance from the Archives Working Group of the Cultural Ministers Council and support of the Australian Council of Archives, produced the *Guide to Records of Indigenous Australians in the Lutheran Archives*. The guide covers records of Indigenous Australians from ten Lutheran Church missions in South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. It contains a list of approximately 13,000 names which relate to Indigenous people mentioned in registers and files held in the archives. Primarily, they document details of birth, parents, marriage and death.

Many records from church groups have been deposited in State Libraries and the National Library. To locate these records people can search either individual library catalogues or the Register of Australian Archives and Manuscripts (RAAM).

Records created by Aboriginal organisations

Government agencies, both federal and state, have requirements to maintain records of their work as part of their record management systems. In time, government-funded Aboriginal organisations currently operating will be required to transfer their records to the responsible State or Federal Archives. Organisations such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and State Land Councils will create records that document a wider perspective of Indigenous experiences. Many will illustrate the struggles that continue to take place to redress past injustices and to maintain an equitable position in Australian society. Other records will reflect the changes in policy and attitudes that occur with successive election of governments.

The question of long-term preservation and storage of records from current Aboriginal organisations is another area that needs to be explored. Are private organisations and community groups keeping records and will they be retained for future preservation? Link Up (NSW) currently stores records on-site as would many others. A number of community keeping places are being established around Australia, and Indigenous people are recognising the need to obtain copies of records about their communities and to collect oral histories, photographs and genealogies that relate to their area. The Northern Regional Library and Information Service in Moree, NSW is setting an example of work that can be done in a local community. Library workers have consulted with the local community to collect and copy photographs and family histories of local significance, building up a significant resource and archive on Kamilaroi history. Archivists could provide professional advice to Indigenous communities interested in establishing keeping places about recordkeeping requirements and appropriate storage of records for long-term preservation.

How far have we come?

A complete survey of Indigenous resources is undoubtedly a major work. The resources that are highlighted in this paper illustrate some of the better known guides and finding aids that document records relating to Indigenous people in the 20th century. The survey reveals that records that are most widely available are those that have resulted from direct State and Territory administration of Aboriginal affairs. Many records are still yet to be identified. Records of other government agencies, who were also active in the collection of information on Indigenous people, are far less visible within the guides. Identification of these types of records would take a major commitment and allocation of financial resources.

Taking into consideration the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been researched and documented in the past, it becomes evident from this survey that many gaps exist in the records. Many records have been destroyed, whether from negligence, intentional loss or poor recordkeeping. As mentioned earlier, the majority of archives that document Indigenous experiences come from a non-Indigenous perspective. The majority of the records are written by observers, researchers and officials of government and church agencies. A major gap exists in providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander versions of history. Oral history projects, such as the *Bringing Them Home* Oral History Project at the National Library of Australia, hope to redress this imbalance by recording stories told by Indigenous people and their families.

Other resources that are of particular significance and are not widely available are private collections. Although significant work has been carried out by the Lutheran Church Archives and the Catholic Church, many other records from church groups have not been identified and resources, if created, are not widely known or made available. In particular, personal papers and records of private stations, pastoralists or large landholders that may have had interaction with or employed Indigenous people are not easily accessed. These records if made available through local archives would be invaluable for Indigenous people conducting research.

In 2001 there are many dedicated people working within the archival profession and related fields adding further to the documentation of Indigenous resources. In asking the question of how far we have come in bringing the knowledge back home, it is evident that a lot of work is still to be done. Many Indigenous communities are still not aware of what records exist and what steps need to be taken to gain access to them. The next step perhaps is to conduct outreach work to communities to invite Indigenous people into archives to do research. Perhaps then there will be a move for archives to support communities to establish keeping places with material that relates specifically to that community.

Undoubtedly as more Indigenous people are employed in archives and community members are represented on committees and guiding bodies, that change and developments will continue to take place. After all, for many people this is a real journey, not merely a hobby or research project, but a process of healing past injustices and, in a wider sense, recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history.

ENDNOTES

- 1 H Fourmile, 'Who Owns the Past?: Aborigines as Captives of the Archives', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 13, nos 1–2, 1989, p. 3.
- 2 L Anemaat, 'Documenting Secret/Sacred (Restricted) Aboriginal History', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 17, no. 1, May 1989, pp. 37–49. Margaret Reid presented a paper at the 2000 Conference of ATSILIRN (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network) titled 'Modifying Hallowed Practices: The Archival Profession and the Management of Records relating to Indigenous Peoples'.
- 3 B Berzins, 'Archivists and Aboriginal Records', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 19, no.2, November 1991, pp. 193–205.
- 4 Sonia Smallacombe, 'Indigenous People's Access Rights to Archival Records' presented at the 1999 Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, Brisbane (available on the ASA website at www.archivists.org.au).
- 5 www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/rciadic/rciadic_summary/rcsumk05.html#Heading13.
- 6 *Bringing Them Home* Report, p. 3, available at www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/hreoc/stolen/stolen37.html.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 16.
- 8 Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples available at www.archivists.org.au/pubs/positionpapers/atlsi.html.
- 9 Indigenous Resources on the Archives of Australia website at www.archivenet.gov.au/Resources/indigenous_aust.htm.
- 10 Rowena MacDonald, *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth Government and the removal of Aboriginal children of part descent in the Northern Territory*, IAD Press in association with the National Archives of Australia, 1996.
- 11 *My Heart is Breaking: A Joint Guide to Records about Aboriginal People in the Public Record Office Victoria and the Australian Archives*, compiled by M Deverall and I MacFarlane, AGPS, Canberra, 1993, p. 43.
- 12 *Guide to Records Holdings relating to Aboriginal people*, available at www.nt.gov.au/nta/4_guides/4-10_ab.h.
- 13 *Aboriginal Affairs Records*, available at web.liswa.wa.gov.au/waaborrec.html.
- 14 www.archives.sa.gov.au/aboriginal/main.htm
- 15 www.aiatsis.gov.au/archprod/avarch/AIATSIS_archives.htm.
- 16 *A Guide to New South Wales Parliamentary Archives relating to Aboriginal People* is available at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au; select 'parliamentary services', then 'archives'.
- 17 www.usyd.edu.au/arms/archives/.
- 18 *A Piece of the Story: National Directory of Records of Catholic Organisations Caring for Children Separated from Families*, a research project undertaken by the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, November 1999.