

# Reviews

Edited by Adrian Cunningham

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future: Report of the Archives Task Force*, London, March 2004. 97pp. Available at: <[http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/atf\\_report.pdf](http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/atf_report.pdf)>.

'Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future' is a report of 'an in-depth analysis and review of the state of the UK's unique and diverse archives'. The review was conducted by and the Report prepared by the Archives Task Force, a body established for the purpose by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

What an inspiring and timely report it is. Not just for archives in Britain but for us in Australia as well. The key recommendations are for the creation of a digital Archival Gateway to ensure that 'the collections in the UK's Archives are readily accessible to everyone', the establishment of an Archive Forum to oversee the implementation of the Gateway (and the other recommendations of the Report) and the provision of ten million pounds (A\$25.7m) to make it happen. Further recommendations are for the establishment of an Archive Development Programme to implement a wide range of other measures for modernisation, audience development and capacity building in archives, including the development of the skills and expertise of archivists. The cost of these additional six recommendations is almost another 2 million pounds (A\$5.14m).

The scale of what is proposed may seem overly ambitious, even audacious, to us in Australia. Yet there are reasons to believe it may happen. The report was commissioned by a government department

(the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and the recommendations fit into some key policy prerogatives of government (including the 'Knowledge Web'). The report is also underpinned by other developments in archives in the UK including the Government Policy on Archives and its associated Action Plan. Just as importantly though is the context for the recommendations, an existing well developed digital archival network. This network includes a2a, the Access to Archives program which now contains more than 6 million entries describing archives held in 340 record offices, libraries and other repositories throughout England and SCAN, the Scottish Archive Network, which is digitising and providing access to the holdings of more than fifty Scottish archives. Finally, the ubiquitous Heritage Lottery Fund just might provide the 12 million pounds (A\$30.85m) necessary to make it all happen.

The best part of the Report is the future it maps out, the vision it provides of what archives can be in communities in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately there is not the space here to provide more detail on the findings and the recommendation. I encourage you to go to <http://www.mla.gov.uk> and read the full report.

Should or could we seek to implement some of the elements of the vision in Australia? We may not be able to and will not want to implement them all. For those elements that we do see as relevant (and affordable) we may need to work to a less ambitious implementation timetable. But the vision in 'Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future' could be the catalyst for a strategic analysis we might profitably have in our own country about the future of archives.

There are recent developments in Australia which might form the framework in which that analysis can take place. The Collections Council of Australia has now finally been established with archives involved on an equal basis with museums, galleries and libraries. Might the Council provide the initiative and (some of) the funding for archives in Australia that the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council provided for this review and Report in Britain? And the need for own Archives Gateway, the National Online Archival Network (NOAN), has been agreed upon, researched, costed, and researched and costed again.

Would our own 'Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future', a higher level review and report on our future, help engender the support that might finally make NOAN a reality?

Ross Gibbs  
Director-General  
National Archives of Australia

**Margaret Proctor and Caroline Williams (eds), *Essays in Honour of Michael Cook*.** Liverpool University Centre for Archival Studies, 2003. 151pp. ISBN 0 947608 21 4. £10.00.

This ten essay collective work celebrates the fifty-year career of British archivist and educator, Michael Cook. Eighteen distinguished archivists from four continents reflect on key developments in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all of which reflect Cook's influence and areas of interest: local and regional archives, archival infrastructure, records management, IT applications for managing archives and archival information, standards for archival description and archival mentoring, education and training.

With Michael Cook's career interests as a starting point, the ten essays fall into three groups: those that highlight key issues dear to Cook's heart, those that attest to Cook's influence on archival thought, practice and infrastructure and those that reflect upon the development of archives and records management over the past half-century.

Six of the ten essays comprise the first category. Masahito Ando (Japan) rallies Japanese archivists to support more truthful assessments of Japan's role in World War II and promote reconciliation through regional partnerships in 'Recovering memory, sharing memory: archives lost and displaced in the Asian-Pacific War and the responsibility of Japanese archivists'. Francis X Blouin (USA) explores the tensions arising from multiple and competing views and experiences in 'History and memory: The Vatican archives and constructs of the past'. Marcel Caya (Canada) provides an evaluative overview of major streams of development and contribution in 'Standardising archival descriptive standards: The case of the "content" note'.

Fernanda Ribeiro (Portugal) discusses the basic shift in Portuguese archival education from historical to information-based disciplines in her 'Archival education in consonance with a scientific-informational paradigm'. Michael Roper (UK and ICA) on his 'The International Council on Archives and automation' chronicles the vital cross-fertilisation between the membership and work of ICA's descriptive standards and IT related committees. In 'Developing a records management system: human and technical challenges' Frank Scheelings and Patrick Temmerman (Belgium) explore the importance of cross-disciplinary involvement in achieving effective recordkeeping. All of these resonate with elements important to Michael Cook's success: networking, harmonisation, inclusiveness and flexibility among multiple partners and viewpoints.

In the second category lie the essays of An Xiaomi (China) 'Changes and Directions in Archival Research — The influence of Michael Cook's publications in China', Anne Thurston (UK & Commonwealth) and African colleagues Yonapika Yonaz Shaid and Mwanahamisi Mtengula (Tanzania), Pino Akotia (Ghana), Festus Khayundi (South Africa), TM Lekaukau (Botswana), Cletus Axangweo (Ghana) and Nathan Mnjama (Botswana) 'An African Appreciation of Michael Cook'. These pieces highlight Cook's collaborative and resilient contributions to sustainable archival infrastructure and education in Africa and China via partnering and mentoring relationships between local and UK institutions.

The third grouping reflects upon the journey and transformations of the past half-century in archives and records management thought and practice in the United Kingdom. Peter Emmerson (UK) addresses 'The Growth of Records Management in the UK: From insignificant cog to vital component' and David Vaisey (UK) 'Now and Then: Reflections on forty years in archives'.

Cook's personal contribution to international archival practice has been comprehensive and its impact has been magnified many times over in the students he has inspired and mentored and who now lead archival endeavour in many countries around the globe. This *festscript* is both a work of tribute and a cogent exploration of the personalities and events that shaped international archival landscape over the past fifty years.

**William E Jarvis, *Time Capsules: a cultural history***, Macfarland and Company, North Carolina, 2003. 321pp. ISBN 0786412615. AU\$60.05 plus \$6 postage and handling. Available from DA Information Services, 648 Whitehorse Road, Mitcham Victoria 3132. Phone: +61 3 9210 7777 Fax: +61 3 9210 7788.

Sydney's Powerhouse Museum (Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences) celebrates its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. To conclude the celebrations, a time capsule is to be produced. This will be suspended like a satellite in the Museum's main hall in April 2005, and filled with 'items of value or desire to represent the current time', contributed by NSW schools that share an anniversary with the Museum (founded in 1879). In seventy-five years' time the capsule will be opened, on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Museum's foundation.

The Powerhouse Museum project shares its major characteristics with similar projects detailed in William Jarvis's exhaustive and scholarly study of the time capsule phenomenon. It is diachronic in intent: it will carry the present – soon to be the past – into the future. It will convey items perceived to be representative of today's culture to the society of that future. And, stored away in 2005 at the end of one significant anniversary, it will be opened on another.

Most people nowadays know what a time capsule is, so much so that the term has become a metaphor. I recently heard someone refer to a stalwart of a local historical society as a 'time capsule' – by which she meant someone who personified the history and character of a particular place. So it was a revelation to read in *Time Capsules* that this useful term was coined only in the 1930s, by George Edward Pendray, initiator of one of the definitive time capsules of the 'golden age' of the form, the 'Time Capsule of Cupaloy'. Designed for the Westinghouse company as its contribution to the 1939 New York World's Fair, this millennia-spanning project (designed to carry 1930s culture 5001 years into the future), 'did much more than just promote a Fair event ... Today just about anything that makes the past come alive can be, and probably has been called, a time capsule, itself a significant historical legacy' (p. 173).

Jarvis's study of time capsules is, therefore, not limited to an examination of projects denominated by that term. His historical reach extends back to the earliest forms of written communication and memorialising. In

Jarvis' schema, writing and its supports, archaeological remains, archives, libraries and museums are all time capsules. Deposits of coins, bones, and other artefacts — and of course foundation stones — are time capsules as well, and his examination of how these objects work in this way is illuminating.

While all these reminders of the past act as time capsules, the task of actively creating and depositing a time capsule is far more complex. The occasions for which time capsules are created are significant, as are the dates at which they are set to be retrieved. Some are amazingly ambitious, both in the range of contents chosen to represent a society at a point in time; and the amount of time they are expected to traverse — some time capsules are set to be retrieved after several millennia. The contents of time capsules are much debated. Considerable thought goes into the most appropriate media for conveying information about a society, and the technological supports required. The section dealing with the preservation of materials for their long journey into an unknown future will fascinate those charged with preservation on a larger, institutional scale, who face essentially the same task — of ensuring that records are kept for present and future generations, and can continue to be accessed by them.

Probably the most fascinating section of the book is that dealing with the Golden Age of time capsules which, not coincidentally, is that of the Golden Age of World's Fairs, from the 1930s to the 1980s. World's Fairs by their nature are paeans to the technological progress attained by the present, and the notion that our culture will survive into a brighter future, in which the works of the past can be accessed and marvelled at. Similarly, the section of the book dealing with the proliferation of time capsules around the Millennium period of 2000 captures the expansive mood of that era.

By way of conclusion, Jarvis sums up humankind's motivation for creating time capsules: 'We have an archetypal urge to dedicate, commemorate and recall a variety of pasts for any number of possible futures. Time capsule deposits are a focused way we express that aspiration' (p. 254).

Roslyn Russell  
Marsden Russell Historians

Joan M Schwartz and James R Ryan (eds), *Picturing Place: Photography in the geographical imagination*, IB Tauris, London, 2003, 354pp. ISBN 1 86064 752 9. \$US27.50 (paperback).

Picturing place is a seminal work. While it appears to be at the intersection of cultural geography and photographic theory, its importance to the practice of archivists and records managers is as profound as for the academic disciplines it transects. This book builds on the moment where the geographical eye met with photographic technology, when photographs of distant places began to bring the world to an audience beyond the intrepid traveller. It provides cultural geographers with a body of theoretical approaches and visual evidence as to how people situated themselves in time and space.

Schwartz's intellectual imprint, more so than that of her co-editor Ryan, is evident throughout this work. Whilst this book is marketed essentially to historical geographers, the genealogy of the thinking behind this book is laid out within our own professional literature. Schwartz has been expanding our archival imagination about photographs for many years and this book builds on innovative methodologies developed in her PhD thesis (Queen's, Canada, 1998) and in her award winning papers in *Archivaria*.

At its broadest level, *Picturing Place* shifts the debates about photography as an art, a science or a technology, towards seeing photographs as agents or mirrors reflecting and constructing a sense of space and place. This book moves discussions from what photographs are of, to why they were created and how they functioned. It demonstrates that through rebuilding the contexts of the production and consumption, photographs move from being mere illustrations to becoming evidence of actions and ideas in their own right. This is instantly recognisable to us as pure archival theory, whilst it is laid out in another set of arguments for cultural geographers.

This book is divided into three parts (Picturing Place, Framing the Nation, and Colonial Encounters) and incorporates a gamut of photographic genres as evidence from family albums to commercial, ethnographic and government photography. It covers photographic endeavours in Canada, Europe, the Middle East, India, the US, the South Pacific, and South Africa. The contextualisation of photographic evidence ricochets throughout this book as the broad range of authors

explore the way that visual knowledge is constructed and communicated through understanding the motives of the creators of the photographers and the meanings generated by the audience. While each chapter reads alone in its own right, this work speaks to the archivist looking beyond the individual paper to the thinking behind the whole collection.

Like the photographs of far off lands at the core of this work, this book brings archival theory and sound research practice back home. It provides evidence of the archivists' critical partnership with scholarship, and it amply demonstrates that how we manage our materials can influence research questions in the future. Undertaking the kind of research outlined in this book is much more difficult in many Australian cultural institutions, where many photographs have yet to experience the 'archival shunt' home to re-establish their relationships with the textual material documenting their creation and consumption. One value of this exemplary work to recordkeepers is that it demonstrates, through cutting edge scholarship, the importance of managing visual materials archivally from their moment of creation. The consequence of our continuing to see photographs only as pretty pictures, is that we are active participants in reducing their evidential value, which will eventually inhibit sound research such as that contained in this book. This book ultimately shows why we need to shift our own thinking about photographs from our focus on their content, to documenting and preserving the contexts in which photographs were created and used. Schwartz has demonstrated the value of photographic evidence across a range of disciplines, and has thus provided us with an important manifesto for the sound management of visual materials.

Joanna Sassoon  
State Records Office of Western Australia



**EW (Bill) Russell, *A Matter of Record; a history of Public Record Office Victoria*.** Original archival research by Charlie Ferrugia. Public Record Office Victoria 2003. xi + 227pp. ISBN 1 74097 041 1. \$49.95. Available from Australian Book Publishing, Suite 102, 282 Collins St, Melbourne.

This history of the gathering together of Victoria's colonial and state records has been written by Professor EW (Bill) Russell, who is a former staff member, and now a member of the Public Records Advisory Council, of the institution. He is in a very favorable position to relate the story and make the necessary judgments, therefore, especially as he has, not only his recollections, but also access to public documents, on which to base his account. In addition, he has had the advantage of having a researcher, Charlie Ferrugia, a present-day member of the Public Record Office (PRO) staff, to carry out original archival research.

The work is in many ways a tribute to two people — each of whom has held the position of Keeper of the PRO. The first of these is Harry Nunn, 'the tireless and visionary first Keeper' (so described by the author in a caption to a plate between pages 84 and 85) and the second is Ross Gibbs, Keeper from June 1991 to April 2003, who gave permission for the research to be carried out. Nunn had an extraordinary ability to pursue the objectives on which he had set his heart — the creation of a Public Record Office independent of the State Library, and governed, not by a Board or Commission, but by the Keeper himself. The Public Records Advisory Committee had to be, in Nunn's mind, merely advisory. His staff supported him in this, and in an extraordinary move (in March 1972) Nunn submitted a protest, signed by himself and all his professional officers, to the State Librarian, against a proposal that, despite the recommendations of an Advisory Committee which had enquired into archival provision in Victoria, the ultimate governing authority for the new Office was to be a Public Records Council. An abbreviated version of the protest is printed as a select document (document 14) on pages 78 to 79 of the book — the author describing the moment as one of 'absolute unanimity'.

In Harry Nunn's time, absolute unanimity between the Keeper and his professional staff was perhaps the exception rather than the rule. Following the passage of the Public Records Act of 1973 Bill Russell tells us of rapid turnover in professional staff (p. 113). After the third year from the passage of the Act, the only staff member remaining with

the PRO was the Keeper himself. 'This represented a significant loss of corporate memory. It also reflected the tense relations that had existed for some time between the Keeper and his staff, even sparking significant union activity through the Archives Branch of the Victorian Public Service Association' (p. 113). Russell does not tell us any more about the cause of this tension.

*A Matter of Record* gives a good account of the main events in public records keeping in Victoria from 1836 almost to this very day. Some of the earlier material is a little tedious: perhaps too much detail is given. It is of course important for the archivist who has responsibility for the records to know all about the provenance of some of the more obscure items that were handed over, throughout the early years, to the Melbourne Public Library (later State Library of Victoria) but to outsiders, such detail is immaterial. However, the latter part of the account of public record keeping in the Garden State is excellent – especially the politicking that had to go on before Harry Nunn could get his independent PRO, and the very significant progress that has been made since. The appendixes at the end of the volume are excellent – including the Select Documents (Appendix 1) referred to above, a list of officeholders (Appendix 2) and a very praiseworthy set of endnotes. The index is also quite effective.

Having read this fascinating account from beginning to end, all I can say is that other public records offices in Australia should follow suit!

Robert Sharman

*Archives, Memory and Knowledge: International Congress on Archives, Vienna, 23-29 August 2004.*

Schnitzel, strudel and ... archives. That was the order of the day at the recent International Congress on Archives, held in Vienna. The Congress is the four-yearly highlight of the international archives calendar, generally coinciding almost exactly with the Olympic games.

This year the International Council on Archives (ICA) decided to run an 'open congress'. In a radical departure from previous congresses, the program was designed to be inclusive and wide-ranging, showcasing

initiatives from around the world. Many sessions were planned as interactive roundtables, with discussion encouraged. This generated a positive and constructive atmosphere of debate and information sharing, both in the sessions and throughout the congress activities. Where past congresses have been predominantly arranged around plenary sessions from archival luminaries, the 2004 programme offered a sometimes bewildering array of choices, with up to 16 parallel sessions running concurrently.

With such an extensive program, choosing which papers to hear was inevitably somewhat of a lottery. It can be difficult to decide whether to listen to known, interesting speakers, or take in completely new views; whether to seek out papers relating to your current responsibilities, or take advantage of the program's diversity. The ICA is to be commended for this new style of congress. The highly participative format makes the ICA a more relevant and accessible organisation.

It is difficult to single out particular sessions or papers for mention. A few overall impressions instead. First, the program was a vivid reminder of the amount of work going on around the world to tackle key professional issues. It was also pleasing to see that where there are multiple research initiatives active in the same area (such as metadata schema), the projects are sharing their findings rather than duplicating efforts. Second, there is a sense of confidence about electronic recordkeeping, stemming in part from a growing body of practical experience. Archival responses to the challenges of electronic records have moved from the theoretical to the practical, and the sharing of experiences makes us all more comfortable in dealing with this field. Finally, it was impossible not to be struck by the diversity of our profession. The program included contributions from around the world, from developing countries and from global powers, about bricks and mortar and about virtual archives, about a wide range of formats and from all types of archives.

Papers are being made available on the Congress website and I would encourage people to take advantage of this resource flowing from the Congress. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to follow up some of the (many) sessions I was unable to attend.

The plenary speakers were selected from outside the world of archives, and were notable figures from Austrian public life. For me, the most

stimulating of these was Ferdinand Lacina, a former Austrian Cabinet minister. Lacina spoke of the importance of records to allow multiple re-interpretations of the past, and linked this to the post-war depiction of Austria as the first victim of Nazi Germany, a myth of collective innocence.

As important as the content of the papers is the unparalleled opportunity for networking that the congress presents. Where else does one get the opportunity to mingle with over 2000 colleagues from around the globe? Actually locating specific individuals can, however, be difficult. I know of several colleagues who were present at the Congress, but whom I never encountered during the entire week.

Overall, the logistics were up to the complex task. It seems petty to grumble that the structure of the printed program made comparing the abstracts for parallel sessions cumbersome, or to mention occasional confusion regarding the simultaneous translation arrangements. These could be put down to the adoption of the new – more complex – multi-stream program. One must not underestimate how important the catering is to a conference experience. Each day the delegates were treated to an array of Austrian specialities for lunch. Despite the venue being out of the city centre, delegates were provided with passes for the city's transport system, making access to the Congress simple, and enabling one to take full advantage of time in Vienna.

The professional program is only part of the total Congress package. For example, the Congress is where the General Assembly of the ICA is held. At this General Assembly the major issue for discussion was the adoption of a new constitution by the ICA. A number of resolutions were also adopted, dealing with matters such as the protection of archives and records in the face of war, flooding and other disasters; the World Summit on the Information Society; and the safeguarding of archives of sport and the Olympic movement.

The social program also deserves mention, particularly the closing ball at the Vienna City Hall. This impressive neo-Gothic building provided a stunning setting for a night of music, dance, food and wine. With the vast numbers of ball-goers spread across many large rooms mobile phones were much in evidence as people sought out colleagues and compatriots.

Tours were offered to a range of archives in Vienna, including the historic and picturesque Hofkammerarchiv, images of which feature in the Congress publicity material. This fascinating building was purpose built for the archive in 1842, and has been kept in its original form. An obvious source of pride, the Hofkammerarchiv was referred to extensively by practically every Austrian speaker.

An ICA Congress is a wonderful experience for any archivist, and the new format provides both more opportunities for direct involvement, and more relevant and diverse content. I encourage you all to start saving for the 2008 Congress in Kuala Lumpur.

John Roberts  
Archives New Zealand

***From Concept to Reality, 21<sup>st</sup> National Convention of the Records Management Association of Australasia, Canberra, 12-15 September 2004.***

The 21<sup>st</sup> National Convention of the Records Management Association of Australasia was true to its theme in providing a plethora of examples of the journey 'from concept to reality'.

Themes touched on included e-government, governance, security, legislation, development of the profession, preserving electronic records, change management, standards, systems implementation and self-management.

Registrants' creature comforts were well catered for in the excellent venue, the National Convention and Exhibition Centre. I particularly appreciated the cloak room service that enabled us to enjoy moving about unencumbered — and encumbered you were if you held the conference 'satchel' close. The satchel was welcome to carry away the voluminous material provided to registrants plus their choices from the comprehensive trade exhibition. The catering provided tasty food efficiently and the enthusiastic diners demanded that you not loiter if you wished to be satisfied.

Early in the program Dr Peter Shergold, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, presented e-government as the conceptual

means by which a whole-of-government approach may be effectively pursued in the seamless delivery of Federal Government services. Perhaps ominously, he noted that data sharing is seriously under utilised due to the 'paradoxical inhibitor' of privacy. This is an example of just one of the issues to be considered before realising that dream of e-government. Dr Shergold recognises that we have come a long way in our use of technology when we look where we have been, but not far when considering the potential.

Dr Luciana Duranti provided an update on novel research being conducted by the InterPARES research team as it searches for means to establish the authenticity of electronic records. This search is based on the realisation that in the digital environment we lose the original record and deal with copies of copies of copies. The challenge is to preserve views of 'experiential digital entities' with their context. In an effort to develop robust theory and practice they are conducting research in the performing and visual arts. One challenge they are addressing with digital music is the preservation of details of all influences involved in its composition and performance — this has not been done before.

Several speakers specifically affirmed the importance of records management and provided examples of the increasing quantity of legislation and number of industry standards that define what is to be done. The challenge for the profession is to respond effectively with limited resources when, as Chris Hurley reminded registrants, automation has led to a loss of corporate control of records. He provided the industry with a memorable quote when he referred to records management as the 'handmaiden of evidence solutions'.

The pre-published Conference Proceedings, available in paper and CD form, captured about 80% of the program. Jack Waterford, Editor-in-Chief of the Canberra Times, and Dr John Tickell, presented two unpublished highlights.

Waterford's forthright presentation of experiences with ministerial offices, FOI and electronic records was entertaining and informative. It described a culture within ministerial offices, of non-recordkeeping enabling denial of knowledge of events, of ministerial staff assuming roles previously pursued by public servants, and the lack of or blurred transmission of ministerial decisions back to departments. FOI processes have, in his experience, tended to move from secretiveness minimising access to records, to drowning applicants in documents that are so

voluminous their content is not considered in the decision-making process. He confessed to being unable to retrieve electronic records after relatively short periods, and to technology enabling the simple creation of the perfect un-annotated document that suggests a cover-up. His observation of workplace trends such as worker mobility, ceaseless organisational change, de-specialisation, devolution and managerialism lead him to conclude that they will, or already have, destroyed effective recordkeeping.

‘Do everything in moderation, except laughter, sex, vegetables and fish’, was Dr Tickell’s message. Unexpected advice but it, together with many other gems, was welcomed at the end of proceedings. Other gems included ‘Government don’t do health, they do sick’, health is about self management, ‘Remember the relevant F’s, Family, Fun, Friendships and Faith or spirituality’, and ‘the rule of fifteen – eat fifteen different plant foods per day’.

Since returning from this conference I am very conscious that we are now well into an era where the centres of power are seeking urgent responses as they realise the high degree to which they rely on effective recordkeeping to conduct both public and private business. A major challenge for recordkeeping professionals is how to respond to the realisation demonstrated by Adrian Cunningham and Colleen McEwen in their respective capacities as standard maker and solution implementer, that there are no quick fixes in managing and keeping records.

Peter J Crush

***Challenges in the Field: Challenge and be Challenged*, Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference, Canberra, 15-18 September 2004.**

***‘Crown jewels or low hanging fruit?’***

Set in the surrounds of the Bradman Pavilion at Manuka Oval, the ASA *Challenges in the Field* conference set the bar high for archivists to hit a boundary in the archives outfield. Though some delegates felt like a silly-mid-off, players and attendees rose to the challenge of introspection

into the archival profession and to question the success of accessibility and accountability in their field.

Though referring to ripe, round or wrinkly fruit on archival websites when one speaker questioned whether archival institutions were putting their crown jewels forth, the general reply was 'yes, they are doing OK'. However, as delegates found out, archivists are not wearing their cups tight enough and risk getting whacked with a cricket-bat right in the googlies.

### ***'Who else has a Chris Hurley?'***

Gabrielle Hyslop applauded the introspection and self-questioning of the archival profession, preceded by Chris Hurley's challenge to archivists to accept the fact that they are 'professionally immature'. Chris took the *Challenges in the Field* to a new level, by bowling some bouncers at his own team-mates, confronting the ASA itself to take an active role in judging and benchmarking archival practice.

On the Heiner Affair Chris added, 'Some may tell me to get over it [Heiner] ... I *have* moved on ... to a post-Heiner phase'. Using the Heiner Affair as an example, Chris championed the need for a widely accepted and enforced guide and set of benchmarks for archival practice. Appraisal rules and policies need to be consistent with best practice and there is no defence 'if what you are doing stinks'.

When are archivists and recordkeepers checked, judged, punished or corrected? All delegates would have agreed that checks and balances should to be put in place, and that benchmarking needs should be decided upon by a collective consensus. But who has the time, authority and resources to guide archival conduct in Australia? Chris would say the ASA does, and that it is their responsibility to hurry up and enforce professional codes, to admit to others' past mistakes and to change future behaviour. A guide could be created in an attempt to correct future actions, but the profession and professional associations need to be humble enough to address collective failures.

### ***'I only work here'***

Other speakers echoed Chris' concern about the ramifications of the Heiner Affair and challenged archivists to question, 'who guards the guardians?' Who is responsible to punish those that make an 'honest' mistake? It was reiterated that employees cannot hide behind the



corporate veil and that individuals need to take responsibility for their own actions. But is the archival profession also collectively responsible?

If the *Challenges in the Field* conference put forward any challenges, it was a challenge to delegates to see how many unanswered questions the delegates could bear (or dismiss as rhetorical).

As an extension of social theory written by Gavin Sinclair, *I only work here*, Dr Royston Gustavson raised the issue of manipulation of or by agents in a corporation and asked the question, 'is an agent with a lack of experience or knowledge a blameless instrument?' Diffusing responsibility from the amoral model, that is, that each individual takes exclusive responsibility, archival 'blame' lies somewhere in between the overall corporate responsibility and personal responsibility of employees (between the functional and autonomous models of corporate ethos). That is, if both bodies know which rules to follow.

#### ***'Rooting around in each other's navels'***

There are no suitable checks and balances if we work alone. All professionals must collaborate with others for the benefit of their own evolution, and any type of disposal or appraisal schedule is disaster-ridden without collaboration. As Don Boadle suggested, by collaborating and working together to examine 'each other's navels' we can actually locate and 'pick out any nits'.

The conference organisers had obviously learnt from the lessons of the 2003 ASA Conference *GLAM: Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums* last year. The speakers from various institutions illuminated what archivists could, should, — and evident in various ways — what should not be done. In short, it is best to collaborate with others and examine navel fluff of many shapes, sizes and smells from all different sectors.

#### ***'The dung was chosen for the attractive fluting patterns'***

Discussed at the joint RAAPSIG/CAARA day (a day organised by the Reference, Access and Public Programs Special Interest Group and the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities), exhibiting records and related items was identified as a challenge in the field for conservators, exhibitors and public programs specialists, whether these items be Jay Arthur's examples of cow pats or 'freeze-dried huskies'.

What do we choose to exhibit and highlight in our past? Are archivists the best people to exhibit their holdings? Indeed, archivists are best informed about provenance and context of the records they provide to the public. Treasures are not hidden in a pile of rags for historians to discover, the archivist has kept a gem in its original, if sometimes drab, context. By collaborating with historians and end-users and somehow 'society' at large, archivists are challenged to find middle-ground. The *Challenges in the Field* proceedings questioned archivists' methods of interaction and participation with historians and end-users, calling into question what we keep as highlighted elements of 'chosen' history.

*In Conclusion, 'if you're going to get your tits lifted, you don't employ a baker'.* You try not to employ a baker that is, unless you're surgeon falls ill half-way and you have to stitch up the wound fast. You do need collaboration from all sides, not partners that peer over your shoulder during the operation, but ones that create benchmarks, guides and procedures to supply the best tools to facilitate a great rack of records.

Overall, the two days of the conference contained an abundance of praise for the 'important job' that archivists (no matter how you pronounced it) perform and how important they are. Archivists had plenty of their fans cheering them on, and may have learnt to value the hecklers that keep them playing straight.

Some speakers were challenging archivists to 'pull their socks up', but if archivists yank any harder on their own, then they risk straining something in their jock-straps. However, fun is not exclusive only to 'rogue extrovert archivists' as one audience member proudly described herself. Even the most light-hearted or self-interested can provide a valid platform to discuss issues in the profession. Needy archivists and historians may even receive funding for projects to increase the crowd numbers watching teams bumble through the 'fog of ambiguity' in new arenas of archival practice. If archivists start to polish their crown jewels hard enough, they may even get a national database for Australian archives, a charter of ethics; and a current, collaborated and non-controversial guide to archival best practice — a nit-comb for our navels.

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