

Reviews

Edited by Adrian Cunningham

Victoria L Lemieux, *Managing Risks For Records and Information*, ARMA International, Lenexa, Kansas, 1994. 100 pp. ISBN 1 931786 18 6. US\$42.00.

In recent years there has been increased recognition of risk management being a significant issue for organisations and more generally as a concept worthy of formal study. This study has culminated in, for example, the development of AS/NZS 4360:1999 *Risk Management* and other publications to analyse risk and how best to respond to it. While much has been done to formalise approaches to risk management, it is not by its nature either an exact science on the one hand or, on the other, a matter capable of being reduced to a check list of compliance requirements. In short, the type and level of risk are inextricably linked to the activities. Opinions on a particular risk will vary widely. Thus, unless an event has manifested itself either frequently or recently, the human response is to discount its likelihood. Therefore, there will be no precautions taken against the possibility of an occurrence or for response plans to be ready. The Asian tsunami of 2004 and its consequences is an example of this mindset.

For an organisation, the fundamental task with risk management is convincing the organisation's management that it is an issue worthy of significant attention from the organisation as a whole. The first response by an organisation to an identified risk is often to deny its existence or downgrade its likelihood to one of being too insignificant for concern. In part, this attitude is because comprehensive risk management for an organisation is expensive in terms of the time resources required to do the analysis in the first place – let alone to properly implement strategies and to maintain them over time.

But the approach in the high level is simple as put by Victoria Lemieux (p. 20) with *Strategies for Risk Management* as:

1. Avoid it
2. Transfer it
3. Reduce its likelihood
4. Reduce its impact
5. Accept it.

The task of developing risk management for the records of an organisation is much more difficult in the absence of an overall approach to risk management by the organisation. The problems for recordkeepers are exacerbated by the fact that today an organisation's records are often not managed as a discrete function in a specialist unit.

The aims of Lemieux's book are:

1. To introduce records and information professionals to key ideas on risk management.
2. To introduce records and information professionals and other readers to records and information risk and to encourage them to take a more holistic and coordinated approach to the management of such risks within their organisations.
3. To impart a methodology for assessing records and information-related risks.

The book provides a good general informative discussion of the nature of risks and possible responses to situations for recordkeepers. The strengths of the book include a clear explication of the concepts of risk management, with an emphasis on the use of diagrams and tables. In this sense, it is not only a practical guide to planning, but also contains much that is useful for when the recordkeeping professional is trying to communicate (or sell) risk management to an organisation's management. For ease of use, the content of the book is covered in the form of highlighted sidebar boxes setting out key learning points and tips. In addition, the book also contains a short but very useful bibliography.

If you are going to seriously consider risk management for records then this book is a very useful starting point.

Stephen Yorke

Maria Brosius (ed.), *Ancient Archives and Archival Tradition: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World*. Oxford University Press, 2003. 384 pp. ISBN 0 19 925245 9. US\$65.00 + US\$10.00 shipping and handling. Available from <<http://www.oup.com/us/?view=usa>>.

Most Australian archivists, if presented with the research findings assembled here by Maria Brosius, would probably struggle to fully appreciate them. Those whose higher education qualifications included an ancient history major might be fine, but for the rest of us? Some will be familiar with Ernst Posner's 1972 *Archives in the Ancient World*, a classic reissued two years ago by the Society of American Archivists with a new introduction by James O'Toole. I doubt the ASA has even a shortlist to match his expertise, Andrew Wilson's doctoral research making him probably the most likely candidate. A few of us might have followed James Sickinger's 1999 *American Archivist* article on literacy documents and archives in ancient Athenian democracy. A few may even recall probably the only occasion our own journal covered such territory, when in 1981 Anne Marie Schwirtlich discussed the archives of the Roman Republic. (Coincidentally a piece in the February 2005 issue of the RMAA's *Informaa Quarterly* covers the same territory).

If correct, this pessimistic conclusion would be unfortunate. A professional sensibility about where one's societal role and methods evolved from is surely valuable, for example understanding the ancient lineage of ideas linking records with 'trust' and 'bond'. Such knowledge would also provide very useful background to some of the points at issue between Paul Macpherson and Frank Upward in recent numbers of this journal, and would be ideal armoury too in the never ending if low grade 'history war' surrounding the historical roots we share with libraries. Recently, to directly buttress an argument a university librarian wrote that the very earliest known library 'was an organised collection of clay tablets containing political and religious transactions in Babylonia in the 21st century BC, and which recorded the contribution of the

dynasty and leader of the day'. The word '*transactions*', of course, gives the game away; but if one needed convincing, the detail is available in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions*.

Here, Maria Brosius has gathered work from fifteen senior academic scholars working in such fields as archaeology, linguists and history and specialising in Assyriology, hittilology, papyrology, Hebrew, ancient Greek and Coptic, Aegean scripts and epigraphology. Although the contributors are not archivists, even so it is wonderful to see them write of 'record-keeping' and 'archivization', and illustrate the documentary outputs of work flows such as receipt chains. The chapters are reworked papers from a 1998 workshop in Oxford organised by the Centre for the Studies of Ancient Documents. Unlike Posner's classic which, according to one blurb writer of the reissued version, 'cuts a broad swath through the ancient world', Brosius' volume covers essentially the ancient Near East from the third millennium BC to the Seleucid empire. So there is no mention of the Tabularium and a passing reference only to the Metroon.

At the end of her scene-setting chapter, Brosius wrote that many of the difficulties faced by her and her colleagues 'derive from our inability to ascertain the context of archival material independently of the records themselves ... Generally... we are taking particular records and using them without an understanding of the archival practices that they reflect'. You have to sympathise with those who try to study ancient archives as archives, and the only sources they have are the archives themselves and what can be gleaned from their archaeology and philology. Imagine trying to understand Australia's national archival system with no copy of the legislation, no annual reports and so on, but just a handful of actual files. Anne Marie Schwirtlich, in her 1981 piece, likened the challenge facing Roman archives scholarship to being limited in the study of Australian archives to some volumes of the likes of Manning Clark and Patrick White.

In fact limited sources turns out to be a matter of 'just when you thought things couldn't get worse ...'. Collectively the chapters can be read as exercises in overcoming obstacles, and it is quite a list. Take the 'documents' themselves. They were made of terracotta (eg cuneiform clay tablets), papyrus (in such forms as pasted rolls or *tomoi synkollesimoi*), wooden boards, stone, leather and most never survived the two to four millennia journey to present time. Fire and poor

environmental conditions were among the usual suspect causes. What did survive has had to be located through patient archaeological toil, conducted and documented by scholars whose research interest were usually not local archival arrangements. Documents located by illicit excavations by so-called antiquity hunters usually had very poor documentation, one of several ways micro and macro context was lost. Context could be lost when the room location from a find spot was not recorded, critical if one is trying to identify archival functions via the purpose of particular store rooms. It could be lost when tablets, date classified by storage location, spilled to the floor of a store room when fire destroyed the wooden shelves; when tablets and their clay envelopes were separated; when tablets stored in clay tablet-containers and their clay tags tied with string were irrevocably separated; when the 'second pages' and 'supplements' of letters could not be matched; and when items were broken losing the sealed or inscribed metadata.

In the face of these odds, extensive research was produced and we now have this professionally useful summary of some of the world's earliest archives; archives which were being created and stored and used in an area associated with the Garden of Eden and the cradle of civilisation. A good topic and a good book.

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Wythe, Deborah (ed.), *Museum archives: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2004. xiv + 256pp. Hardcover. ISBN 1 931666 06 7. SAA member price US\$45.00, non-member price US\$62.00. Product code 435. Email <publications@archivists.org>.

The Museum Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists has produced a new and greatly expanded edition of this introductory text. The first edition, written by William Deiss in 1984, was part of the SAA Basic Manual Series and a mere 37 pages. Under Deborah Wythe's editorship, a team of 16 museum-based archivists, bringing a wide range of experience from their work in art, history, anthropology, science and ethnic museums, presents a comprehensive 256 page instruction book on archival principles and practices applied to the museum

environment. The target audience is the archivist new to museums or the non-archivist given responsibility for establishing a museum archives program. The authors believe that the volume would also be of interest to museum curators and registrars, photo and film librarians and digitisation project managers.

Introductory chapters cover the museum archives movement, the museum context and 'getting started'. Then follow chapters on archival practice - appraisal, arrangement, description, access, outreach, accessioning, preservation, security, disaster planning, records surveys, records management and oral history. Special formats get their own individual chapters - photographs, audiovisual materials, architectural records, electronic records (including digitisation), objects, and field records and scientific notebooks. There are chapters on two special museum issues of current ethical concern - the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and the restitution of Nazi-looted art. The book concludes with a Resource Guide containing lists of professional organisations, continuing education opportunities, a bibliography, sample policies, procedures and forms, lists of funding sources and archival product vendors and the new SAA Museum Archives Guidelines.

It is a dense and wide-ranging text, so my comments are limited to a few chapters.

An excellent overview is provided in the chapter 'The Museum Environment'. It outlines the organisational structure and business functions of the typical largish museum, the activities of each department and the types of records created. The value and use of museum records is explained, as are some particular museum records issues such as the enormous volume and duplication of exhibition records and the blurred line between the official and personal papers of curators (who write professionally as subject experts, historians and scientists). The chapter provides a sound knowledge base for the archivist new to a museum with which they can set forth into departments to meet staff and survey records.

The chapter 'Appraisal' is disappointing in that it gives little practical assistance to the new archivist. 'Establish guidelines and procedures. It may be helpful to develop a set of criteria and a decision-making grid', it says (p. 30), without further elaboration. No samples of appraisal

policies or criteria are provided in the appendixes for this most challenging area of archival work for the experienced and novice alike, though references to further readings are given.

The book is still firmly in the 'archives as end of records life cycle' mode. There is no records continuum here. For Australian archivists familiar with (even if not whole-heartedly implementing!) *AS 4390*, *AS ISO 15489* and the DIRKS methodology, an archival text with a discrete short chapter on 'records management' (and Chapter 14 at that) and which treats electronic records as a 'special format' (Chapter 19) seems startlingly old-fashioned. Even if records and archives are administratively separate units within a museum (as they often are), the Australian approach provides a role for the archivist in the analysis, design and redesign of the museum's current recordkeeping systems. That the archivist may get involved at the system design and records creation stage is hinted at in this chapter: 'Appraisal is not always reactive. If you notice a gap or a potential problem in recordkeeping, consider approaching the relevant department and suggesting changes to alleviate these difficulties' (p. 31). But the idea is not pursued, even though the chapter goes on to identify the resultant problem of most museum archivists being bogged down with 'microappraisal' at the records transfer stage, necessitating time-consuming 'detailed sorting and weeding'.

Museums are the point at which the three collecting traditions – libraries, archives and museums – meet and the museum archivist must come to terms with the philosophies and practices of each, listening, co-operating, but insisting on the need for the archival approach for archival materials. The chapters on arrangement and description detail the differences of approach (collection versus item control, intellectual versus physical description, the importance attached to context) and emphasise why the archivist must explain and justify the need for a separate archival management system within the museum, rather than 'piggybacking on other departments' systems'. In the chapter 'Objects in the Archives' the author imagines an archivist, librarian and curator sitting at a table with a 'thing' in the centre. Each brings particular professional perspectives and strengths to the management of 'things' in collections. The archivist brings expertise in contextualised documentation of materials, the librarian a long history of public access cataloguing and the curator the ability to interpret the materials and

educate a lay public. These moments happen and let there be more of them.

The book is profusely illustrated with black and white photographs, largely of historic images from museum collections. The authors have wisely chosen not to include shots of present-day archivists performing archival tasks which made the first edition (at least visually) date so quickly. The text is well-indexed and referenced throughout. Another feature is the use of side-bars interspersed throughout the main text which contain checklists, case studies and definitions, as well as anecdotes and quotations from individual archivists giving the wisdom of their experience. It was frightening for the reviewer to see a quote from her rather naïve student essay published in *Archives and Manuscripts* in 1984 quoted in this book twenty years on!

A selected bibliography of print and web-based resources is provided, conveniently grouped by subject category. Of course, there is a North American bias, but six Australian references are included and some British. In the category 'Museum Archives' I note the absence of reference to significant British resources, such as the Museum Documentation Association's *Managing Archives Collections in Museums* (Cambridge, MDA, 2002, Standards in Action, Book 4) and the useful *Archives Practice Guidelines* issued by SCAM, the Standing Committee on Archives and Museums (set up in 1989 by the Museums Association, the Society of Archivists and the Association for Independent Museums). The listed reference to the Museum Association's *Guidelines on archives for museums*, ca1991 has long been superseded by the *Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom*, 3rd edition, 2002. It seems a shame, when the specialist literature on museum archives is so small and mostly from the formative years of the museum archives movement (1980s to early 1990s), not to have aimed for comprehensiveness in this category of the bibliography.

The volume's strength, of course, is its application of archival principles to museums, but I believe it would also be useful to 'small' non-museum archivists with its overview of basic archival management processes, its advice on special formats and the perennial 'objects in the archives' issue, and tips on promoting the archives within one's organisation.

It is twenty years since the first edition of this book. How far we have moved on from the early 1980s when the foundation records of both

Australian and American museums began to be taken from their hidden stores where they had suffered the benign neglect of decades. At that time we were just beginning our work of convincing administrators and others what a museum archives program could do for the efficient running of our organisations and, in particular, the contextualising and interpreting of our collections.

The SAA Museum Archives Section is to be congratulated on the production of this volume. Whilst at times I found myself alienated by the differences between Australian and American practice in the book, at so many other times I found myself saying 'ah yes' at another insightful comment on the peculiar institutional culture of museums and the particular records issues that arise from it. Though the book's subtitle is 'an introduction', its topic coverage is mighty impressive and it remains the major work of the field.

Helen Yoxall
Powerhouse Museum

Barry Howarth and Ewan Maidment (eds), *Light from the Tunnel: Collecting the Archives of Australian Business and Labour at the Australian National University, 1953-2003*, Friends of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Canberra, 2004. 254pp. ISBN 0 64643 824 7. \$25.00 + \$3.00 postage and handling. Available from the Friends at ANU LPO Box A231 Canberra ACT 2601.

'Strong professional foundations, proud history and peerless supporters' enable the Noel Butlin Archives Centre to face any challenges, states Sigrid McCausland in the final article of this book. *Light from the Tunnel* gives the reader both a history of one of the major collecting archives in Australia and an impression of the fundamental strengths that have allowed the Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC) to withstand many pressures over the years.

This publication is a fiftieth anniversary tribute to the Noel Butlin Archives Centre. It was compiled and funded by the Friends of the NBAC, edited by two stalwarts of that organisation, and its production was financially supported by several trade unions. It represents what the editors call a 'collective sigh of relief' at the Archives' survival.

Light from the Tunnel depicts the NBAC's first 50 years with 19 articles (including Stuart McIntyre's 'Introduction') appearing in roughly chronological order. The articles themselves are an eclectic mix. They range from Suzanne Fairbanks' analysis of social warrants for collecting organisational records to the Business Council of Australia's commendation of the NBAC by Mark Triffitt.

The most interesting articles are recollections of those involved in the NBAC's early history and more recent struggles for survival. Robin Gollan, Selwyn Cornish and Ann Turner give an idea of the excitement of the early days gathering records and Noel Butlin's drive to establish the collection. Barbara Ross, the first archivist with professional skills employed at NBAC, describes exactly how control and management systems were established for the growing collections of records. Archives Officers in charge of the NBAC are well represented: from Bruce Shields' inside story of relations with the National Library, to Michael Saclier's tales of the period of great growth in the 1970s and 1980s. Some have gone back to the records themselves while others have given us an emotional sense of the time in their recollections. 'The Archives Wars' by Ewan Maidment and Barry Howarth is an engrossing piece full of climactic moments about the struggles to ensure the NBAC's survival intact.

The user perspective is given strongly in several articles from researchers who have come to know and love the NBAC. A constant theme is the joy of discovery and the praise and gratitude for welcoming, engaging and knowledgeable staff.

The volume is rounded out with photographs, a list of staff, abbreviations, an index and information on the contributors. There are a few editorial errors but overall it is a well presented volume.

Light from the Tunnel is worth dipping in to for the reminiscences of how such a significant archival institution came to exist and flourish. The loyalty of researchers, depositors, supporters and staff is striking and uplifting.

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Helen Ennis, *Intersections: Photography, history and the National Library of Australia*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2004. ix + 277pp. ISBN 0 642 10793 9. \$59.95.

There is something in the air ... the State Library of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Art, and now the National Library have produced major works about their photograph collections, with the next likely cab off the national rank the Australian War Memorial. This cluster of books will, over time, provide an interesting set of markers for contemporary Australian institutional understandings of photographs. For now, the focus is on the first survey of the National Library's photograph collection.

From its title, this book promises a look at the intersections of photography, history and the National Library. The author challenges herself to make sense of the large photograph collections, whose disorientating power provides some of the creative energy for this project. When articulating her struggle to make sense of the collection, Ennis writes that art historiography and photographic connoisseurship seem woefully inadequate when faced with tens of thousands of items (p. 1). She also sees, understandably that 'the National Library's extraordinarily rich holdings offer all manner of challenges to conventional ways of seeing and analysing' (p. 3).

This book is structured around seven thematic chapters and portfolios of sixteen professional photographers. Interestingly, unknown and amateur photographers, who often present very different views of society to professional photographers, are represented more before World War I than since that time. Thematically, the photographs cover the built and natural environment, people and social life, industrial development, war, exploration, and more visually barren moments such as Federation. Aboriginal people naturally appear at the beginning of the book, and at the moment where modernity threatens the myth of cultural stability, but the representation of works by Aboriginal photographers is meagre.

Ennis has written books for the National Library on several photographers represented in this book, and in the end, the lens through which the collection is observed is a familiar one. Despite her early musings about the intellectual challenges she faced when trying to make sense of the collection, Ennis falls back on the art history approach that

she herself identified as being inadequate in trying to comprehend the collection. Her lens is clearly focused on the content of the photographs, above why they were created or how they were used. In the end, despite its early promise, the book feels rather restrained.

In her introduction Ennis notes that the passion of the staff and the collectors has sustained collecting activities, but there is very little discussion of this in the book. Some of this history of collecting photographs was told by Ennis in the National Library's own history, *Remarkable Occurrences*, but would have been useful to reiterate for this audience. Around every photograph there are stories of delicate negotiations with difficult families who are aware of the national importance of the material they hold, or the salvage of albums from local tips. These are some of the intersections between photography, history and the institution which bring the activities of the institution alive.

This book concentrates solely on items in the pictorial collections without reference to relationships with other materials in the Library, or investigating the vast riches of the manuscript collection's documentary photographs. Using these extraordinarily rich photograph collections as the conduit to explore their relationship to other forms held in the National Library, this book could have given the reader an understanding of the *active role* that photographs have played in shaping our understanding of the past. Instead, we are treated to a reverential but passive view of photography as an aesthetic form, with gentle discussion about the role of the picturesque, a lovely muse on why the most important national moment – Federation – is so visually barren, and thoughts on the private photographs of war. However, we learn little of the photographers' intent, contemporary responses to the material, or its relationship to other materials held in the National Library. In this sense many of the photographs are passively presented as isolated images rather than contextually as historical documents. Imagine the difference if the image of Dombrovskis' Rock Island Bend, which is said to have changed the course of the 1983 federal election, had been reproduced from the newspaper advertisement, or if the photographs by Nettleton had been reproduced from international exhibition catalogues for which they were originally taken?

In saying this, it is a beautiful book, the reproductions are lovely and the writing at times borders on the poetic. However, the more I read and reflected on the potential of photographs to tell a range of stories, the more I saw that this book represents only a very small part of the picture.

Joanna Sassoon

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The Society of American Archivists, *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*, SAA, Chicago, 2004. xxi +269pp. ISBN 1 93 1666 08 3. US\$49.00.

It is perhaps apt to situate this review of *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* in a journal edition that brims with stimulating new thoughts on archival descriptive practice. Published in 2004 by the Society of American Archivists, *Describing Archives* is the latest statement of North American practice on archival description. It stands as a stark contrast to the thinking that is being proposed in other parts of this edition.

This practical manual is a replacement for the previous authoritative text in America by Steven Henson, *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts*. The review of that earlier text was required given the new technological environment of the World Wide Web, EAD and XML, which have highlighted incompatibilities in descriptive practice, making it difficult to exchange and create cumulative archival descriptions and the need to accommodate *ISAD (G)* and *ISAAR (CPF)*. The publication is the result of consideration commencing in 1996 and at one point, before divergent views made this impossible, the undertaking attempted to incorporate both Canadian and US views (perhaps known to many as the CUSTARD project – Canadian US Task Force on Archival Description).

The introduction to the volume indicates that this is ‘a content standard for finding aids’. The introduction to the work states that it ‘moves away from the bibliographic model represented by the *Anglo-American cataloguing Rules* ... to reflect a more thoroughly archival approach to description’. Starting from an articulation of Statement of Principles, which provide ‘a concise articulation of the nature of archival materials

and how that nature translates into descriptive tools', the work then moves to a statement of rules supporting the principles. The work is carefully grounded as 'accepted professional practice in the United States' implying that some of the professional practice in other parts of the world might be different, and perhaps addressing the 'significant differences between Canadian and US practice' that signalled an end to the goal of issuing a joint content standard.

Having been distressingly unable to come to grips with either the APPM or early MARC-AMC manuals, this work is far more accessible to this reviewer. Perhaps this reflects my own growth in understanding, or perhaps the more sinister interpretation is that a growing interest in metadata standards and work has affected my brain. However, personal speculation aside, this work is quite accessible and sensible in many aspects.

Of course, having stated that it is grounded in US practice one cannot criticise the fact that it doesn't accommodate our own archival descriptive practice. And it doesn't. It reflects a view of archival description that is one dimensional – that is it describes only record entities, and describes all other entities (persons and functions) as attributes of the record. Similarly, it is strictly hierarchical, and incorporates attention to the ISAD and Canadian multi-level rule, which conceptually from an Australian perspective I find difficult to interpret as anything other than a restrictive practice. Having said this, the work allows for discretionary judgement on what constitutes an appropriate grouping to treat as a unit, acknowledging different interpretations but requiring a fixing of the layer to apply to rules, rather than allowing multiple representations at different layers of accumulation. While the notion of inheriting descriptive information from higher layers of accumulation is supported, there is nothing that really deals with inheriting 'descriptions' attributed to the records when they were in current use in the record-creating body.

The view of description encompassed here might be a move away from library cataloguing practice, but it still seems to embody a very physical view of the world. Arrangement and description are very closely linked, appropriate perhaps in the physical world, but not relevant in an electronic world. The emphasis is on producing a product, albeit now 'a variety of outputs'. There is still a presumption of a 'correct' order.

There are (I think) 25 element areas identified in this content standard grouped into eight major areas (identity, content and structure, conditions of access and use, acquisition and appraisal, related materials, notes and description control). But the 'I think' represents a problem I encountered in interpreting the publication. The most concise place to find the specific elements seems to be the table of contents, but then this also encompasses material in the publication that are not about elements. Similarly the numbering of the rules themselves is linked to the numbering of paragraphs and sometimes I was confused about whether something was a rule or not. I guess this doesn't matter much, but I did find it quite confusing.

After describing the rules in the eight groupings each of which constitutes a chapter within Part One of the work, the remaining Parts Two and Three, contain detailed instructions on 'Describing Creators' and 'Forms of Names', a substantial component of the work. It discusses 'authority records', and as an Australian archivist, I freely admit to complete confusion as to what an archival authority record is. Whether it is an additional access point, thus apparently different from something which is a major and inherent part of the archival description, or something which constrains the way the text within a particular element is presented, that is, a syntax for expressing the semantics of the element. Chris Hurley has suggested that the latter authority record notion might actually be a better approach in that it allows the existence of a separate descriptive element in its own right that can be linked, rather than subsumed within a record-centric description. But at this point I just get confused. In this publication, it seems that it is both, because creator appears both in the Part One (the element and rules part, but dealt with in only two paragraphs) with major attention focused in Part Two 'Describing Creators' with its attendant confusion for me about authority records.

As someone who plays around with metadata, I should be able to find great resonance with this work. And, as indicated above, I feel much more comfortable now than at any time in the last 25 years. But metadata approaches look to machine processing and flexible reuse of information painstakingly gathered and expressed. With that orientation, I find many of the rules too muddy still. As we know in our traditional expression of 'administrative history' there are many things that could be pulled out (for example functions, roles, activities) and structured to therefore

be available for different uses. This content standard perpetuates the merging of concepts within large elements. The date element is always good for critique and this one is far too simplistic a view of what dates are about. The 'extent' element serves as an example as it encompasses what is referred to as material types and physical extent, but which I would see as being genre, documentary form, physical quantity, media, format, duration and perhaps others. Similarly, there seems to be little cognisance of the needs of machines to source schemes (my goodness – perhaps authority records!) which govern the expression within an element, in order to apply some of the clever algorithmic 'intelligent' computing.

Is this publication useful for Australian archivists? If you are working within a library environment which has mandated compliance with *ISAD(G)*¹, or *AACR2*, or its archival extension *APPM*, then I am sure that the answer is a resounding yes. In terms of compliance with the ICA descriptive norms (*ISAD* and *ISAAR*), this publication seems to reflect a significant movement in American practice. But if you belong to a descriptive tradition that is different from the *ISAD/ISAAR* or library cataloguing worlds, this publication is of limited use.

Barbara Reed

Endnote

¹ Note that in the way of the collaborative development of these things, publication in 2004 still didn't leave enough time to use the most recent revisions of *ISAAR (CPF)*.

David Black and Lesley Wallace, *John Curtin: Guide to Archives of Australia's Prime Ministers*, National Archives of Australia and John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, 2004. 251pp. ISBN 1 920807 12 8. \$19.95.

This publication is a guide to the archival records relating to John Curtin, 14th Prime Minister of Australia during the years 1941 to 1945, and his wife, Elsie Curtin. While it is primarily a guide to records held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and the John Curtin Prime

Ministerial Library (JCPML), it also deals with significant holdings of other Australian and international institutions.

The book is the fifth volume in the *Guides to the Archives of Australia's Prime Ministers* series. It is soft covered, A4 sized and its handsome design ties in with the preceding volumes. Its content is arranged according to the well-established style of NAA's guides to records.

The contents are arranged in a simple but logical manner. The Introduction defines the scope of the Guide and introduces John and Elsie Curtin and the two featured archives, NAA and JCPML and their collections. The Guide itself is explained, as are the basic archival principles a novice user might need to understand to use records discovered through the Guide. Some examples show how to make sense of the entries in the Guide and how to locate and access records.

The body of the Guide comprises five chapters and five appendixes. The first chapter is a brief biography of John Curtin. The second, third and fourth are the catalogues of records relating to John Curtin held, respectively, by NAA, JCPML and other institutions in Australia and overseas. The fifth chapter comprises both a short biography of Elsie Curtin and the catalogue of records and collections relating to her.

The five appendixes contain a timeline of significant events in the lives of John and Elsie Curtin; a 'who's who' of significant people in their lives and careers; an impressive bibliography; and contact information for NAA and other institutions mentioned in the body of the book. Copies of some photographs and documents drawn from the catalogued records illustrate the text. Finally, a comprehensive index is included.

The arrangement of the catalogues of records is basically chronological under defined headings or according to the institution by which the catalogued records are held. The information provided for each entry varies depending upon which institution the records are held. There is information to indicate who created the records, series or equivalent information and, where appropriate, details of individual items including references that will provide access to the items.

Throughout the Guide the writing is clear and easy to read. The Introduction very simply, but also quite fully, points the way to using the Guide and finding records.

The biographical components of the Guide are a pleasure to read. Given the length and breadth of both Curtins' involvement in public life, and the short space available to write about it in the Guide, it would have been easy to stick to facts and figures about the events with which they were connected. The authors succeeded though, in painting the Curtins as real people on a canvas of the very major events in their lives and in the life of our nation.

The result of the effective writing and clear, logical arrangement of the content is that this Guide should engage and inform novice and experienced researchers, as well as those who casually read the guide, or who are purposefully pursuing sources of information about John and Elsie Curtin and the events in which they were involved.

The value of a guide such of this is magnified by the level of accessibility to the records that online access provides. The references to record items provided in the catalogue enables researchers to easily view online most of the JCPML records and significant parts of the holdings of NAA. Some records of other institutions are also online. Researchers will be able to use references in the Guide to find more useful information about John or Elsie Curtin and the records about them on-line.

In summary, *John Curtin: Guide to Archives of Australia's Prime Ministers*, would be a valuable addition to any reference collection, be it a private or public one. Its presentation and content, plus the growing availability of online, digital access, together represent a fine example of how our archives can be made attractive and accessible to all.

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Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720-1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender*, University of Chicago Press, 2004. 216pp. ISBN 0 226 41203 2. US\$18.00 (paperback).

Over recent years a mounting stream of studies from the humanities have appropriated the term 'archives' in endeavours to explore the rhetorical devices and power relations implicit in a diverse cluster of information sources. As Marie-Anne Chabin argued in 2002, 'the turn

of the century has ushered in a diversification, even a democratization of the word archives (in the plural and the singular) and its derivatives'.¹ The work of Betty Joseph confirms that the discourse concerning archives has long escaped the specialised circle of archivists and historians, to be integrated into other professions, from information technology to cultural studies and postmodern theory.

In *Reading the East India Company*, Betty Joseph, an Associate Professor of English at Rice University, sets out to investigate how gendered rhetoric in 'archives' shaped colonial ideologies in Britain and British controlled India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She extends the process of textual analysis, normally applied to fiction, to sources including East India company records and select committee reports, which she interprets alongside memoirs, novels and portraits. Analysing texts from the 1720s to the 1830s, she focuses on exposing the evolving roles of British and local women in the discourse of colonialism.

Seen in the context of cultural studies, *Reading the East India Company* is a valid contribution to the application of discursive theory to published and unpublished colonial texts. Joseph follows in the footsteps of influential cultural theorists, including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in utilising the concept of the 'archives' as a diverse mosaic of texts in which power relations and the control of knowledge are revealed. Her focus is on gender and the figure of women in its political context. *Reading the East India Company* describes the act of 'archiving' as a political and gendered process, integral to colonial governance. Archivists are viewed as implicated in the power relations of their archives, with Sir William Foster, the early twentieth century head of the India Office Registry and Record Department in London, described as the 'custodian of the patriarchive', in perhaps the most memorable postmodern neologism in the book.

However, from the perspective of recordkeeping and archival studies, Joseph is culpable of showing the same misunderstandings as Thomas Richards (*The Imperial Archive*, Verso, London, 1993) and other literary critics who have turned their gaze to the role of records and archives in colonial governance and power. She uses the term 'archives' as a global moniker for recorded information, drawing no distinction between company records and novels, legal case files and memoirs, archives and library. The term 'archiving' is seen as synonymous with describing or

recording. By contrast, the role played by correspondence and other written records in the management of Britain's colonies is mentioned only in passing, on the basis of a few guides to the East India Company Archives. There is no substantial analysis of the processes of records creation and management, development and application of archival principles or the results of archival processing.

The promise of the back cover blurb, that the work will be 'an innovative account of how archives – and the practice of archiving – shaped colonial ideologies', is not met for a reader from the recordkeeping profession. Apparently oblivious to the wealth of recent studies on postmodernism in archival theory, Joseph makes no attempt to engage with this professional literature or to deepen her understanding of the principles and processes that led to the development of her textual source material.

Recordkeeping professionals need to be actively aware of the growing academic literature on the concept of the archive, given its potential to shift the public's perception of 'archives' – and, unfortunately, to confuse the role of archival repositories and archivists. The expansion of the concept of archives into other fields holds much potential for the archives profession. It is our responsibility to take up this opportunity and ensure that the voice of archival theory is present and heard in other academic circles.

The repercussions of post-colonial theory for an understanding of the role of archives remain a rich area for research and reflection within archival studies. Archivists should engage in exploration of the power relations embodied in colonial recordkeeping, and their continuity into the present through the institutions that maintain archives. Particularly in Australia, and other former colonies and imperial centres, this analysis is an essential part of ensuring that archival theory and practices keep pace with changes in society.

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Endnote

¹ Marie-Anne Chabin, 'Comparative Use of the Word Archives in French Media', 36th International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA), Marseilles, France, November 2002. English summary

available at: <<http://www.ica.org/new/citra.php?pcitraprogramid=12&plangue=eng>>.

Richard J Cox, *No Innocent Deposits – Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal*, The Scarecrow Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2004. 304pp. ISBN 0 810848 96 1. US\$54.50.

This book raises many issues about archival appraisal – challenging our theory, practices and perspectives. As an appraisal archivist (for the past few years at least) I could identify with many of Richard Cox's broad concerns – the need for archivists to better account for what is in the archives, the challenge of explaining to the public and policy makers why certain records are in the archives and others are not, the lack of measurement by archivists of our success in appraisal, and the lack of nationally coordinated systems of archive acquisition. Besides these broad concerns, I had difficulty identifying with much else in the book as it takes a distinctly North American perspective which does not translate well to the Australian archival scene.

This is not to say the book doesn't provide an interesting insight into the development of collecting and appraisal in North America. Cox paints a big picture of the current and historical context in which archives have been and continue to be formed. This big picture ranges across a diversity of ideas: autograph hunting, the perception of archives as treasures reinforced by popular culture such as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, collecting as a psychological disorder, retention scheduling and archives as a vehicle for public memory. Central to the picture is the history of archive formation in North America, in which historical societies and universities were the primary catalysts for the protection of documentary heritage (through their avid collecting practices) prior to the establishment of government and institutional archives.

The central theme of the book, reflected in its title, concerns how archival collections are shaped. Cox argues that the public and policy makers don't understand how archival collections are formed and that we (archivists) are not good at informing them (or for that matter, each other). Misunderstandings about our work generally, and more specifically about our role in forming archives, abound. This is evidenced in archival 'scandals' (for example, reappraisal at the National Archives of Australia) and media reporting of records destruction or

deaccessioning. Cox argues that these misunderstandings do not support our cause.

A major argument followed throughout the book is that collecting and appraisal are different things, an argument I know is close to some Australian archivists' hearts. Cox identifies collecting as an ad hoc, unstructured activity focussed primarily on the information content of documentary materials and the chase for treasures. Collecting, he notes, can in fact 'destroy the value of archival records'. In contrast, he views appraisal as a more planned and structured process focusing on the evidential value of documentary materials but not necessarily neglecting their value because of the information they contain or their role as symbols. Cox reminds us, however, that even planned and structured appraisal is not without its flaws and limitations. This is where he advocates for archivists to document their appraisal processes and decisions 'as a fundamental part of archivists' accountability to each other, ... to researchers, and to society'. Cox suggests that archivists should be able to articulate to others what their holdings represent.

Cox also argues that archivists need to consider their motivations in acquiring material for their archives. He notes how transferring records to 'the archives' gives them a power which is hard to remove at a later date (such as when undertaking reappraisal or deaccessioning). Acquisition of materials has ongoing implications for the future resources of the institution which must be thought through. Cox proposes that greater cooperation between institutions in their acquisition of archival materials, and more encouragement of the establishment of corporate inhouse archives, might help to address some of the broader resource issues.

How do we know if our appraisal is successful? What can we use as a measure of our success? These are excellent questions that Cox poses but doesn't necessarily answer. He does warn against relying on the degree of use of archival materials as a means of evaluating appraisal work. Cox seems to be suggesting that instead of trying to evaluate appraisal, which is after all a 'very subjective process, fraught with the possibility of mistakes' we should start by learning more about how archivists actually do appraisal within institutions. In effect, he proposes a research agenda which will help us better understand the realities of appraisal work.

Cox's book is in fact a series of essays, presented in chronological order by date of writing, that reflect his 'wrestling with the challenges and contradictions ... of the archival function of appraisal'. The essays were published in one form or another between 1996 and 2003. Because these essays were self-contained works, they were clearly meant to be read individually and not all together. As a result, there is quite a bit of repetition of facts and ideas throughout the book. For this reason I would advise readers to dip in and out of *No Innocent Deposits*, rather than read it cover to cover as I did.

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Richard J Cox (ed.), *Lester J Cappon and the Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship in the Golden Age of Archival Theory*, Society of American Archivists, Chicago, 2004. 234pp. ISBN 1 931666 07 5. US\$45.00.

Lester J Cappon was an American archivist, historian, and editor who achieved a leadership role in all three professions. Throughout his career, Cappon thought and wrote about the place and function of the archivist within and outside of the practice of history, in the process articulating the interaction (and interrelation) between the two disciplines – a shifting, opaque boundary that is still contested today. By asking questions about this complex relationship, Cappon was able in his own mind to navigate the field of archives through a time of professional change and fragmentation. Edited and with a comprehensive introduction to his life and work by Richard J Cox, this volume brings together twelve of Cappon's most important essays, originally published between 1952 and 1982.

The major part of this book focuses on the relationship of archives to history. What is the archivist? asks Cappon. Scholar, or mere caretaker of records? Cappon is firmly in the former camp. The American archivist, he declares, is born of a 'virile historical strain'. He continues: 'It was the urgent demands of historians, not the plaintive pleas of civil servants, that brought about the belated establishment of the National Archives' (p. 44). As Cox points out in his introduction, this was a theme Cappon

returned to time and time again in his written work, and it underpins many of his arguments.

Cappon relates how the archival profession in America grew from the interest and concern of historians in saving government records and private papers from destruction. For Cappon, the relationship didn't end there – rather, he argues that the discipline of history underpins the archival profession. He continually emphasises that the essential historical basis of the archivist is a 'vital' component in aiding the 'pursuit for truth'. He also argues that there are benefits for both professions in continuing to strengthen this relationship, as when writing about the National Archives, at the time newly stripped of its independence by the Federal Government. Noting the stake that historians have in the National Archives, he urges them to be of more professional support, whilst stating that in turn the National Archives would have a lot to gain by entering into a dialogue with historians.

Cappon's belief in the superior talents and importance of the scholar, or historian-archivist, led him to distrust the information specialist 'of little learning'. Cappon had worked as a records manager and was certainly quite aware of the increasing synergies between current recordkeeping and the archival profession, even asking 'At what stage in the life history of records do the professional activities of the archivist begin or end? (p. 109). But his argument is that archivists' abilities are of a higher value than those required for activities relating to recordkeeping and therefore 'records officers should carry the main burden of records administration' (p. 110). It is only the archivist-historian who can understand the need for 'better preservation of the records, their proper control, and their accessibility for research' (p. 44) – whose historical training enables the extension of subjective judgement to critical analysis.

It is therefore not surprising that Cappon views with suspicion FG Ham's seminal 1976 paper 'The Archival Edge' in which Ham urged for the development of guidelines to enable collecting of archival data to occur at a national level. Collecting is best undertaken, Cappon opines, at a local level by those who know the material under examination, and who are informed by the principles of historical scholarship. He worries that Ham's proposals will lead to archivists influencing the formation of the documentary record by suggesting what should be created in the

first place: 'research collections are not generated by superimposed proposals from a national planning office' (p. 82), he argues.

The final part of this volume relates to Cappon's writing on documentary editors. While not explicitly stated, the relationship of the historical editor to the archivist is evident. For example, Cappon discusses the inevitable presence of the historical editor in the printed manuscript, while noting the necessity and desirability of the interpretive process. Cappon also argues that the historical editor is not a 'narrow-minded purveyor of documents but rather a historian, a 'knowledgeable scholar concerned with the meaning of the sources at his command' (p. 160). Cappon further illustrates the relationship between archivist and editor when he writes that 'the historical editor of source materials is a historian whose responsibility consists first, in transmitting authentic and accurate texts of all extant documents within a rational frame of reference, with due respect for archival principles, and second, in making those texts more intelligible' (p. 147).

Cappon's work demonstrates an inspiring belief in the importance of archives and the ability of the archival profession to remain strong at a time of fragmentation, when administrative, managerial and technical fields were gaining influence. Although Cox comments in his introduction that this volume will be most of interest to North American archivists, Cappon's arguments relating to the intersections of archives and history have the ability to facilitate discussion within the profession irrespective of geographical boundaries. This is because many of the issues Cappon writes about are still challenging archivists today – albeit some in technically evolved disguises. As Cox notes, while Cappon's essays can appear dated at times, they 'engage us today in contemporary debates and issues' (p. 31). And it is because they find resonance with our twenty-first century experience that it is worth re-examining what Cappon had to say.

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Frank M. Bischoff, Hans Hofman and Seamus Ross (eds), *Metadata in Preservation: Selected papers from an ERPANET Seminar at the Archives School Marburg, 3-5 September 2003*, Veröffentlichungen der Archivschule Marburg, Institut für Archivwissenschaft Nr. 40, Archivschule Marburg, 2004. 259pp. ISBN 3 92 383377 6. 23.80.

Metadata in Preservation presents a selection of papers from a metadata training seminar held at the Marburg Archives School in September 2003, as part of the European Commission funded ERPANET (Electronic Resource Preservation and Access Network) Project. The seminar brought together a number of researchers and practitioners involved in digital preservation initiatives in archives, libraries, government, and academic sectors. Its aim was to provide an overview of metadata issues and state-of-the-art initiatives, as well as a forum for the speakers and participants. Seminar reports and presentations are available from the ERPANET website.¹ The papers presented in this volume are extended versions of these presentations in the light of discussions both during and after the seminar.

The volume begins with introductory papers by the seminar leaders, Hans Hofman and Wendy Duff, highlighting the wide range of differing perspectives of metadata, its key role in preservation initiatives, and identifying common challenges in metadata creation and ongoing management across domains. Duff reminds us that no one profession or community can meet these challenges alone and that it will be through collaboration that robust, workable and interoperable solutions to preserving digital entities will be found. The remaining papers develop this theme, describing a number of practical preservation projects as well as reflections on how the multitude of metadata activities may be harmonised.

The practical preservation projects discussed include: digital preservation initiatives at the National Library of New Zealand; the production of XML standards as part of the Danish eGovernment strategy; the development of the Digital Long-Term Archive at the Swedish Social Insurance Administration; and, an overview of the German DOMEA concept (Document Management and Electronic Archiving in IT-supported business processes) and associated development of archival and appraisal interfaces. For some of these endeavours much of the available literature is in the projects' native

languages, so this volume plays a valuable role in providing information about them to English-speaking audiences.

The more reflective papers raise questions relating to metadata interoperability, practicality and sustainability. The need for a diverse range of metadata standards with differing functional perspectives is recognised and for those just wanting to make some sense of this diversity, James Turner from the Université de Montréal describes the MetaMap project² which provides a visual representation of the relationships between metadata standards, sets and initiatives in the information management area using the metaphor of the London underground map. The economic imperative of cost-effective metadata creation and management is also raised, with the need in particular for the exploration of strategies for interoperability. Michael Day of UKOLN discusses the role metadata registries may play in managing metadata about metadata sets to facilitate automated translations for preservation purposes, and Andrew Wilson, from the National Archives of Australia, raises application profiles as a technology to build modular metadata frameworks. The need for practical research into these possible solutions is also highlighted.

The publication of the papers from this seminar helps us to see what work is going on with preservation metadata – but also what is not. The overall impression is one of chipping away at parts of the digital preservation problem, with acknowledgement that there is still a long way to go. The specific solutions presented may work in their particular contexts, but whether they have the scope to develop the necessary complexity and flexibility for universal application is doubtful. Some of the authors and projects seem to be aware of this. For example, in discussing the digital archive at the Swedish Social Insurance Administration, Lars-Erik Hansen points out that it will be subject to continuous development and improvement as a result of what its actual operation will uncover. Others, by not recognising that we are still formulating our understandings of digital metadata and associated technologies, may be in danger of adopting too simplistic, and, ultimately, when it comes to digital preservation, merely short-term solutions. Both Malcolm Todd from the National Archives of the UK and Barbara Hoen of the State Archives of North Rhine-Westphalia highlight the need for archivists to be proactive and get involved with

developments in their early stages, so that the records management and archival perspective can be taken into account.

The strength of this volume lies in the balance it strikes between the practical and the more abstract or reflective papers. While many are demanding instant, immediate and absolute answers to digital preservation issues, the reality is that all professions and communities facing these challenges are in the very early stages of development. We are all experimenting with what needs to be done, and, more importantly, understanding why. This volume, in bringing together a cross section of voices, makes us aware of a range of metadata initiatives and can therefore contribute to building the shared knowledge and understanding that will ultimately lead to the development of robust solutions for digital preservation.

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Endnotes

- 1 <<http://www.erpanet.org/events/2003/marburg/index.php>>.
- 2 For more information about this project, see <<http://mapageweb.umontreal.ca/turner/meta/english/>>.