

# Reviews

Edited by Adrian Cunningham

**Australian Government, Management Advisory Committee, *Note for file: A report on recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service***, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2007. 56pp. ISBN 978 0 9803978 0 2. Available at <http://www.apsc.gov.au/mac/noteforfile.htm>

*Note for file: A report on recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service* (dated 31 August 2007) was prepared by the Commonwealth Government's Management Advisory Committee. According to its website, 'the Management Advisory Committee (MAC) is a forum of Secretaries and Agency Heads established under the *Public Service Act 1999* to advise the Australian Government on matters relating to the management of the Australian Public Service' (APS). The MAC 'considers a number of management issues where analysis, discussion, and the identification of better practice approaches would inform and promote improvements in public administration.' Indeed, the MAC has produced reports and publications on subjects such as managing and sustaining the APS workforce, connecting government and reducing red tape.

It is encouraging to see a body such as the MAC involved in reviewing the state of current records management in the APS. While the National Archives was involved in the preparation of *Note for file*, it is rare for senior officials to take such a direct interest in broad recordkeeping issues. In the Preface the Committee says that the Report is aimed at a general audience 'because all APS employees have some recordkeeping responsibilities.' *Note for file* certainly deserves to be read by public servants as it provides a good introduction to recordkeeping issues and, as indicated by the MAC, it should spur a 'sharper focus on recordkeeping.'

The Review's terms of reference were to:

1. articulate the purpose of recordkeeping in the APS context, the 'business case' for it, and identify the impediments to effective recordkeeping;
2. explain how record creation/keeping interacts with the Australian Government's information collection, use and disclosure obligations; and
3. explain how efficient and effective recordkeeping can be achieved in a modern Commonwealth agency, having regard to the increasing scale and complexity in recordkeeping brought about by the proliferation of electronic communications and new electronic media.

The Review appears to have met these objectives. *Note for file* is divided into six chapters and two appendices with supplementary material available on the web through a series of case studies of current recordkeeping practices in small, medium and large agencies.

*What is a record?* includes some definitions, describes different classes of records and introduces what are considered useful or important Commonwealth records. The Report takes a high level approach to this issue and introduces various kinds of records and their respective values. The chapter also provides some useful guidance to public servants who are faced with the ever growing types and formats of information.

*Focusing on the Right Records* discusses judgment when considering different kinds of records and provides some sensible commonsense approaches to records management including capturing records into recordkeeping systems.

*The Case for Recordkeeping* is particularly good and is the most useful part of the Report. It links recordkeeping to APS values as well as to the code of conduct. It also puts forward the business case for keeping records, including increased productivity 'whether by making better decisions or avoiding incorrect ones (informed by useful records).' I have referred a number of professionals working in the global recordkeeping field to this chapter as it provides some useful arguments when faced with senior officials who, while agreeing records are important, find it hard to understand why they should take any real direct interest in their management.

*Supporting Good Recordkeeping* examines work flow and risk analysis, DIRKS, the broader link to information strategies, and 'the context and

financial value of the event or decision, and the benefits (versus potential liability and cost) of creating the record.' This section emphasises linking recordkeeping to broader information and knowledge strategies an essential yet often overlooked aspect of information management. All too often there is a disconnection between electronic information management and e-government on the one hand and records and archives management on the other. In addition, I was pleased to see the discussion of financial values versus potential liability and cost of records creation and management. This too is increasingly important to agencies.

In terms of DIRKS, the report notes that some of the steps are 'often too complex and resource intensive.' Clearly if senior managers view recordkeeping processes as too onerous or implementation too rigid they will balk at having to follow requirements. DIRKS is a useful methodology but its implementation must be flexible and adaptable to local environments. It appears that the National Archives is now taking such an approach.

This chapter also looks at the requirement to make records and notes in the 'absence of a specific legal obligation to do so, it comes down to judgment.' It is interesting to contrast this with the New Zealand *Public Records Act 2005* where there *is* a specific legal requirement to create and maintain records. Of course even in the New Zealand context more detailed practical guidance is required around records creation.

*How recordkeeping interacts with information collection, use and disclosure obligations* considers the legal framework including intellectual property issues, the Archives Act, Financial Management and Accountability Act, FOI, and Privacy Act. There is the comment that 'An APS employee who misapplies, improperly disposes of, or improperly uses Commonwealth records may be in breach of the *Financial Management and Accountability Act*.' No doubt in the eyes of many employees the *Financial Management and Accountability Act* figures more prominently in their working lives than the other Acts.

*Assessing the Current and Future Recordkeeping Environment* notes that 'recent research shows that higher quality recordkeeping is achieved when the recordkeeping burden is lifted from general employees'. Encouragingly it supports the employment of expert records managers. It also has a very good section on understanding the challenges and

issues' surrounding effective recordkeeping, identifies some strategies, and concludes by outlining the current direction of electronic records management.

*Note for File* takes a positive approach to the consideration of recordkeeping in the APS. Although the case studies do pick up on some of the challenges faced by agencies and outlines some good practice, I would have liked to have seen some examples in the main Report of poor recordkeeping and how these had been addressed. That said, *Note for File* should help agencies identify issues particularly as government moves from manual to electronic systems.

Outside recognition of records issues is important, and input from bodies such as the MAC provides further credibility to the work of records professionals. Indeed this recognition and input is essential if effective recordkeeping is to be successfully managed in the public service.

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Consultant

(Michael Hoyle was formerly Group Manager, Government Recordkeeping at Archives New Zealand. He has worked at the National Archives of Australia and has been closely involved in government recordkeeping issues in the Pacific, Asia and Africa)

**Australian Society of Archivists, Committee on Descriptive Standards,** *Describing Archives in Context: A Guide to Australasian Practice*, ASA Inc., 2007, available from the ASA, PO Box 77, Dickson ACT 2602. ISBN 978 0 9803352 3 1. \$35.00 (\$25.00 for ASA members).

This book should have been published at least a year earlier than it was. I say this because, when it came out last year, I was already in the throes of converting the Australian National University (ANU) Archives from an interim accession system to the series system. I had decided that rather than use the Commonwealth Record Series (CRS) system familiar to me from my twenty-odd years at the National Archives, I would get back to basics and start with the International Standards ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF). I would take from those standards what suited the collection

I was converting: the University's own archives (not the business and labour collections of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre). It is an 80-year accumulation of records relating to tertiary education in Canberra, ranging from official records of the ANU and its various predecessors, to personal collections of Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, academics, general staff and students, and to various bundles of papers gathered by self-styled 'archivists' before the University Archives was established in 1998.

Faced with over 300 existing accessions which required both appraisal and description, I adopted a 'no-frills' approach, so did not consider registering organisations or families for very long, or indeed functions and activities, opting for just a provenance entity (agency/person) and a recordkeeping entity (series, with an item list). After trawling through the International Standards, I designed three templates to describe provenance (agency/person), series and items. I am pleased to report that they are consistent with the metadata elements recommended in this book, but how I wish that I had been able to start here, rather than with standards designed to accommodate both the record group and series systems. Appendix 5, by the way, neatly maps the connections between the series system and the ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF).

This is a book designed to be read cover-to-cover, and at 34 pages with another 40 pages of appendixes, this is not a hard task. It is not meant to be dipped into, explaining the implementation of the series system in a logical and organised way from key principles through to metadata elements. Early on, it explains its aim to recommend the implementation of the series system to:

- enable full and accurate description of records in archival environments;
- increase standardisation of descriptive practice across Australia; and
- facilitate the sharing of data.

Along the way it does more than this: the first two chapters explain what is unique about the series system, how it evolved and how it compares to the record group system of description. Although not too obviously arguing that the series system is better, it is a constant thread of the work that the series system provides more flexibility, can be scaled and

modified to suit your circumstances, and facilitates the sharing of data in online portals.

In articulating the principles of the series system there is an emphasis on the minimum requirements (one record entity and one context entity) and how the system can be adapted for collecting archives and small archives, with examples from school and religious archives. The book does not provide practical advice on implementation issues, referring readers to *Keeping Archives* instead. So while it provides the theoretical framework to answer questions that I encountered, such as 'how do I document a series created by one Professor of Physiology that was inherited and added to by his successor?', there is no index where you can look up 'multi-provenance series', for instance.

The core chapters explain the components of the series system: entities, relationships and metadata elements, with illustrative examples and clearly set out tables. There is regular reference to adapting the series system for 'your own needs and interpretations' and the examples throughout the text and in Appendix 2 show how this has been done. The Royal Society of Victoria and the Queensland Anglican Archives examples have agency, person, series and item documentation which illustrate how the system works to document series recorded by successive agencies, for instance. The Phillip Law example shows that a family relationship can be shown through a Related Identity Identifier rather than registering a Family entity. I have always been sceptical about registering families, strengthened by a discussion at the National Archives, many years ago, about how to document the hypothetical adoption of a Commonwealth Person by one Commonwealth Family from another!

This book was written by a Committee, with members representing government, university, business and private archives, and archival educators and consultants. This variety of interests may explain the occasional 'camel humps', such as the footnote on page 26 which introduces the concept of ambient entities. Up to this point, entities had been described as 'record' or 'recordkeeping' entities or as 'context' entities (either agent or business) and an example had been given of a 'provenance entity' as a type of context entity, but 'ambient entities' had not been mentioned before. It appears in the glossary, Appendix 1, but it would have been better to have discussed it earlier on. Similarly there is a footnote

introducing continuum theory, which not having been discussed in the text, serves to confuse by introducing a whole new subject.

The last chapter introduces some additional implementation considerations, which are brief statements - too brief, in the case of 'Online finding aids' which says in its entirety:

It will often be useful to conduct or draw upon user studies and/or feedback when considering whether or not approaches to description are meaningful to users and how best to render these descriptions in human interface systems in ways that maximise their meaning and utility.

This is identical, word-for-word, to a sentence appearing in an earlier chapter. My suggestions to improve this for the next edition would include noting that some data may be withheld from online finding aids for security reasons, eg exact shelf location (though one contributor of sample documentation doesn't seem to have a problem providing this information online), and as not all data recorded will be of interest to all users, certain elements can be withheld from display in online finding aids or only displayed if 'full record' is selected.

The ASA Descriptive Standards Committee is to be commended for the publication of this useful guide to the implementation of the series system. One amendment I would recommend for the next edition: adding the ANU Archives to Appendix 3, the list of series system implementations. Perhaps there are other archives who will be inspired by this clear exposition of the series system and will also want to add their names.

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**Carol E. B. Choksy**, *Domesticating Information: Managing documents inside the organization*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, United States, 2006. xxii + 227 pp. ISBN 0 8108 5190 3. US\$40.00.

Dr Carol Choksy is an adjunct professor at the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University, teaching subjects that include records management, strategic intelligence and systems analysis. She is

President of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) International, and has been a certified Records Manager since 1996, claiming over 25 years experience in the field of records management.

*Domesticating Information* reflects Choksy's experience of working in the field of records management. It is primarily targeted at records management professionals and aims to provide tools as well as 'advance the profession of records management by lifting the level of principle, observation and conclusion to at least the level of executive management'. (p. xi)

It commences by outlining a brief history of the use and management of information, and the beginnings of records management in the United States, exploring the rise of practices within the private sector and the impact of frameworks, principles and recommendations developed by Government agencies over time. The timelines reveal the relatively short and recent timeframes of the increase in complexities associated with managing information and highlight that many of the same high-level issues and challenges faced in earlier periods are still being faced today, albeit in different circumstances. When presented in this way, it provides some perspective for the significant time and effort required to design and implement effective electronic records management practices, arising from the ever-increasing use and complexity of technology within organisations.

Next, it provides an exploration of the challenges associated with terminology, including an interesting discussion on the definition of a record, document and information. Believing that the international Standard's definition and in fact any definition provided by the archival community does not stand up to the operational tasks required by records management, Choksy proposes a new definition for a record, based on what Records Managers actually manage in their day-to-day work.

Choksy sees that the primary focus and function of a Records Manager is the management of business objects, rather than cultural or other types of objects. As such, the book explores how Records Managers' work intersects with business processes and it explains the lifecycle phases for managing information, based on Library and Archives Canada's *Records and Information Life Cycle*.



The book also discusses some of the tools of recordkeeping such as metadata and classification, and some of the challenges for records management practices presented by the legal discovery and subpoena process as well as by technology. It proposes that electronic records management is challenging for Records Managers because they have not fully developed the skills that are required in the initial phases of the records lifecycle, and because they have not typically worked strategically to assume a higher profile within the organisation. The book concludes by encouraging Records Managers to progress and influence the development of the profession and to be a part of the solution.

*Domesticating Information* primarily acts as a call to arms for Records Managers to take the lead in progressing and shaping the nature and practices of the records management profession. It is unashamedly blatant in its plea for Records Managers to forge the future, rather than blindly following the advice and theories of others, particularly the archival community.

I found the book to be an interesting read and while written from an American perspective, it does provide room for discussion in the Australian and international context, particularly in light of the records continuum model. I was engaged by its barefaced calling for Records Managers to challenge the evolution of the records management profession, although at times I found the presentation of conflict and opposition between records management and archival positions to be weak, extreme or unnecessary. For example, when exploring the issue of authenticity of a record it is argued that authenticity is an outcome of the information management business process, with the level and quality determined by management and the organisation's tolerance for risk. This is presented as being in conflict with the property of authenticity conveyed by archivists.

It is possible to see that Choksy's intention was to include controversial statements within the book with the aim of pushing the boundaries and to provide fodder for Archivists and Records Managers to continue to engage in constructive dialogue. However, whether her provocative arguments strengthen or weaken the records management discipline or

the case for Records Managers within organisations remains up for debate.

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**Helen Forde**, *Preserving Archives* [from the *Principles and Practice in Records Management and Archives* series - series editor Geoffrey Yeol], Facet Publishing, London, 2007. xv + 320pp. ISBN 978 1 85604 577 3. £39.95.

It is rare to come across a substantial publication devoted exclusively to the topic of archives preservation (as opposed to preservation of archives and other things like library or museum materials). The only similar book I am aware of is *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*, by Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, published by the Society of American Archivists in 1993. I was therefore predisposed to be very positive about this book.

The author, Helen Forde, was formerly Head of Preservation at the UK National Archives and has also taught preservation management at University College London. Her stated aim is to provide a guide to the development of successful preservation policies and strategies. Although many of her examples and references apply specifically to the UK context, she has also included references, examples and case studies from a range of international sources, making this a generally useful guide for readers anywhere.

The fourteen chapters in the book cover a good range of topics relating to archival preservation - beginning with an explanation of the difference between conservation and preservation as it is usually understood in the archival context - that is with conservation characterised as a highly specialised subset of tasks under the broader umbrella of preservation. The second chapter examines in detail the characteristics of materials found in archives, such as paper, parchment, inks, audiovisual materials, photographs etc. Digital preservation merits a chapter on its own, and subsequent chapters cover buildings, storage and environmental control, disaster management, handling and display, pest control, and copying among other topics. There are also useful appendices, a comprehensive

bibliography, a list of relevant British and international standards, and a list of international professional organisations.

The individual chapters are well structured, with the inclusion of stand alone case studies, and ending with a summary of the information covered and a set of notes and references for further reading on the chapter topic. Although some sections are illustrated, there are some places where additional illustrations would have been useful. For instance, the chapter on disaster management includes case studies describing real-life disaster experiences and recovery methods, which would be improved with the inclusion of images showing the resultant damage, or providing visual guidance to some of the common recovery techniques described.

There were also some other aspects of the book that I would describe as niggling annoyances, rather than major flaws. In the chapter 'Exhibiting Archives', the importance of choosing suitable materials for construction of display cases and mounting exhibits is emphasised, and a table is included listing materials that are either not recommended, or are safe to use. This sort of information is very useful in planning exhibitions, and frequently requested. However, the list itself is not sufficiently detailed. It lists three types of wood that should not be used to build display cases, but does not list any suitable alternatives for case construction. Nor does this section provide much guidance about ways of minimising the danger when you find yourself stuck with a certain material and have no option but to work with it.

The biggest disappointment for me is that the book does not explore in any depth the issues that are unique to the field of archives preservation, as opposed to preservation of media in a library or museum context. In my experience, some of the greatest challenges in preserving archives are to do with the physical construction of records and groups of records, and resolving the tensions that sometimes arise between preservation needs, and archival principles such as original order and provenance or context. A simple example of this would be when an archival item, such as a file or bound volume, contains a sub-item with different preservation requirements - such as a large folded map, or photograph, and the only effective means of preserving the single map or photograph, is to physically separate it from the file or volume. I was also disappointed not to find any mention of preservation issues associated with marking or labelling archival material for control purposes. Although barcode

and RFID (radio frequency identification) technologies are both referred to in passing, there is no mention of appropriate ways of applying them to different media, or the damage that can occur if they are used inappropriately.

Despite these criticisms, I found this book to be a very useful guide. Its strength is in setting out the multiplicity of considerations and issues that apply to archival preservation, and emphasis on the importance of establishing preservation as a shared responsibility, worthy of equal consideration among other tasks and activities that archivists might be involved with. It provides a strong basis for development of a comprehensive preservation policy and management framework, and its appendices and bibliography are excellent sources for exploring the subject of archives preservation further.

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**Ailsa C. Holland and Kate Manning (eds.),** *Archives and Archivists*, Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2007. 230 pp. ISBN 1 84682 016 2. GB£50.00.

The editors of this volume clearly announce its mission: the book is intended as a celebration of 30 years of professional archival education in Ireland, and is dedicated to one of its leaders, the late Robert Dudley Edwards. The editors note that 'no effort was made to shape this volume thematically'. In my view, no serious effort was made to consider an audience for the book, to think about who may want to read it and why - and it suffers accordingly.

It is important to note that the University College Dublin (UCD) School of History and Archives is the *only* provider of archival education in Ireland. It seems to me that this limitation may account for some of the limitations of the volume itself. The placement of the archival program within the School of History and Archives undoubtedly emphasises relationships between historiography and archival practice, and many of these essays are scholarly historical works in their own right.

However, the contents suggest that such a placement de-emphasises other important aspects of archival practice. While some of the essays in this

volume talk about 'outreach' activities, only one addresses researcher-focused issues (and not in a particularly new way), there are none on developing outstanding reference services, none on discovery services, none on how records might be used alongside other kinds of documents. While many essays consider the important matter of records which have been lost or saved - very pertinent in a country that lost so many of its archives in 1922 - I was surprised to see no challenging essays on appraisal, very little consideration about the issues of building archives of personal papers, or any serious consideration about how Ireland is documenting its post 1922 culture.

Several essays amply repay more than one reading, even in this fairly 'context free' publication. Among these I would place Bernie Deasey's piece on how codes of ethics translate into practice (including trenchant criticisms of the ASA's own code of practice), Elizabeth Mullen's well-researched essay on Father John MacErlean and his careful building of a pre-Suppression Irish Jesuit Archive from sources held in many other Jesuit Provincial archives, and Patricia Sleeman's thoughtful overview of the destruction of archives in times of war, including in Bosnia and Iraq. The stand-out essay is undoubtedly Editor Ailsa C. Holland's own. Her careful tracing of 20<sup>th</sup> century developments in archives and archival practice in two post-colonial countries - Ireland and South Africa - is a model of comparative history of archival practice. While my own ignorance means I cannot make any judgements about the validity of her own - that South Africa is enjoying a renaissance in archival thinking while Ireland is stuck in a positivist past - I found her evidence and arguments compelling. Given Holland's own position within the UCD School, her *sotto voce* musings about why it is that South Africa (with limited archival education programs) and Ireland (with the 30 year program that this volume celebrates) can have such different levels of energy and self-reflection in their archival thinking, are ironic indeed.

These essays - and one or two others - seem to me to deserve monograph publication. They have enduring value and raise interesting and challenging questions. That said, the quality of the volume's offerings is extremely uneven. The majority are work-a-day descriptions of implemented programs - building programs, digitisation programs, public

programs. I revel in the practical, and many of these papers would be ones that I'd enjoy hearing at a conference (they would have many an archivist nodding and thinking 'that sounds familiar'), and indeed would be useful online publications on the UCD or other website, so that archivists working on a particular problem at a particular point in time could find and refer to them. But they do not, I believe, really add anything new to archival thinking. They do not challenge, they do not call to any kind of action, and they rarely rise above the level of the every-day.

As I read the 15 essays in this book, I could not help contrasting it to the ASA's own 2007 30 year celebration, *Made, kept & used* - where Australia's focus on access is very marked - and to the November 2001 edition of *Archives and Manuscripts* which aimed to assess how well various non-governmental aspects of Australian life are represented in the nation's archives. Implicit in both volumes is a certain suppleness and reflexivity of thought: how well are we collecting; how well are we serving the public. *Archives and Archivists* exhibits no such cohesion, and it is difficult to see it as any kind of mirror to the profession's makeup, assumptions, successes and failures.

The book is very handsome, and while there are a few typographical errors, publication quality is high, so it will certainly look well on any bookshelf. So, will I be purchasing this book for the Library? Would I consider spending my own money (almost A\$110 of it) to add the book to my personal library?

In both cases, the answer is no. The volume lacks any cohesive or sustained examination of the state of Irish archival practice after 30 years of professional training. Nor is it a thematic cohesion in which individual essays take on new meanings when considered against other essays in the same volume. While the aim of celebrating 30 years of archival education at University College Dublin is a worthy one, it is disappointing that the celebration contains so little to capture the imagination. It seems to me that the volume is an opportunity lost, and that it is likely to sit - rather unloved - on the shelves of UCD graduates and few others.

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**Angela McAdam, Margaret Ruhfus, Kate Bagnall, and Rob Gill (eds),** *Keep it for the Future: How to set up small community archives*, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 2007. 64pp. ISBN 1 920807 52 8. \$4.95.

Although *Keep it for the Future* focuses primarily on the management of small community based archives, it is an excellent beginner source for anyone interested in the archival profession. Inexpensive at just \$4.95 a copy, *Keep it for the Future* has professional advice aimed at a readership with little archival knowledge. In five information packed chapters, this indispensable little book takes the budding archivist through the basics of managing a small archives program. It provides clear explanations of key archival principles, and suggestions about how these principles may be implemented in a small community archive.

*Keep it for the Future* promotes the importance of developing clear policies to effectively run small archives. The authors focus on building up a strong strategic base to establish and manage a small community-based archive. As a result, the practical detail required by someone undertaking some work in a particular functional area is either sketchy or missing. Explanations and examples are brief due to the focus and nature of the book itself, and at times serve to outline what needs to be done rather than describing how to do it. This does not detract from the value of the book as the 'further reading' section and references within the text point to other sources where more information can be found.

*Keep it for the Future* is functionally structured and covers acquisition, appraisal and disposal, accessioning, arrangement and description, storage, and access. The authors use boxed handy hints, clear definitions and explanations of archival terms, and practical examples of forms, to illustrate quickly and simply how they might be implemented. Care is taken to ensure that examples are suitable for the target audience of a community based archives, where few if any personnel (including volunteers) have a prior understanding of archival theory.

Key archival principles of provenance and original order are addressed, with time taken to explain how they fit into strategic archival management and why they are important. The authors briefly cover a number of issues, including the following:

- Dealing appropriately with people wishing to donate records;
- Handling access inquiries (including those that may be in breach of legislation such as the Information Privacy Act);
- Effectively utilising a primarily volunteer-based staff;
- Funding the centre through obtaining community grants or charging for copying; and
- Planning ahead to counter potential disasters that would result in damaged or lost records.

The authors prompt the reader to think very clearly about what types of records the archive is to collect, to research whether or not an established archive that collects the identified material already exists, and to determine whether sufficient resources are available before establishing a new archive. The importance of a robust archives policy that includes a sound acquisition statement, access policy and clearly defined roles and responsibilities is a common theme throughout the book.

The structure of the book serves to illustrate how important it is to an efficiently run Reading Room for appropriate effort to be undertaken in the other areas of archival management. Time spent defining what is to be acquired by the archives, describing and arranging the records so that their provenance and original order are maintained, as well as clearly labelling and appropriately storing the records, ultimately lead to efficient Reading Room management. The authors illustrate this by outlining the information a manager of an archive might need to know for each functional area, and advising how this assists with effective overall management.

*Keep it for the Future* may be a small paperback book with only 64 pages, but it is packed with essential information for basic archival management. The structure and style of the book suits its intended audience of a manager of a community-based archive with limited professional knowledge. By doing so, the authors have ensured that the book provides an excellent overview of current Australian archival practice. Use of colour photographs and forms makes the book an attractive addition to any archival library.



**National Archives of Australia, in association with the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, *Max Dupain on Assignment*, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 2007. 96pp. ISBN 978 1 920807 59 7. \$19.95.**

Think of Max Dupain and you probably bring to mind his iconic Aussie beach photograph *Sunbaker, 1937*. *Max Dupain on Assignment*, the catalogue for the eponymously titled National Archives of Australia exhibition (in Canberra until 25 May 2008), presents a different side to Dupain's work many people may find unfamiliar. Most strikingly, it includes industrial and architectural photography that reveals Dupain's interest in the forms of the modern world.

Max Dupain's photographic assignments for government and private enterprise are not unusual in that photographers have been known to produce art in tandem with, or even while, working on commercial projects. It is nonetheless surprising learning about the range of Dupain's activities in government and commerce, and a range of photographs that are far removed from the iconic beach images, but in themselves presenting iconic images of Australian social life and the landscapes it has inhabited.

The first chapter by curator Johanna Parker provides a general introduction to Dupain's career and commissioned work, drawing out the significance of the photographs contained in the catalogue. The photographs featured are mainly from Commonwealth Government assignments but also from work commissioned by one of his major clients, Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited (CSR). The photographic images selected from the latter body of work have been supplied by the Noel Butlin Archives at the Australian National University, a partner in the production of the exhibition and this catalogue. In her introduction, Parker recounts how Dupain began his career in photography in 1929 when he became an apprentice in the Sydney photographic studio of Cecil Bostock. He established his own studio in 1934 specialising in advertising, still life, portraiture and fashion. From 1942, Dupain served in World War II as a photographer, which led to postwar work for various government departments.

The second chapter by Rob Gill provides an insight into what it was like working with Dupain through the eyes of colleague Jill White who worked in Dupain's studio from 1958 and became a close friend. Dupain

bequeathed White his negatives, from which she continues to print, exhibit and publish his work.

Both of these introductory chapters are illustrated with photographs relevant to the material being discussed but the main selection of photographs are to be found under thematic headings in the 6 chapters that follow. Each chapter features a brief, usually half-page, introduction. 'Selling a Nation' is a selection of photographs commissioned by the Department of Information during the 1940s which were used to promote the Australian way of life in an effort to attract potential migrants. 'Promoting Personalities' is a small selection of portraits of members of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's state based studio orchestras. 'Showcasing Industry' contains work mainly commissioned by the Department of Trade and the Department of Information during the 1960s and 1970s featuring images of industry and infrastructure. 'Documenting a Company' focuses on photographs produced for CSR, and mainly depicts aspects of the company's involvement in sugar production in Queensland, but also other matters related to company business, such as exteriors and interiors of its corporate headquarters in Sydney, and samples drawn from advertising campaigns. These photographs have been mainly sourced from the Noel Butlin Archives' collection of CSR business records. 'Engaging with Architecture' shows a selection of photographs that reveal Dupain's sympathy with modernist architecture, from the abstract forms of the Sydney Opera House to the highly rational interior design of office space in the ANZ Centre in North Sydney. Finally, 'Canberra' shows a selection of photographs of the national capital in the postwar years, in which architecture again features prominently among the selection.

I was particularly drawn to Dupain's photographs of industry and infrastructure: the futuristic shapes of insulators on electricity transmission lines at Muhmorah Power Station NSW and the industrial plant of a BHP blast furnace in Newcastle; the geometry of modernist skyscrapers in Sydney's CBD and the interior of the new wing of the Art Gallery of NSW; the space age dome of Canberra's Australian Academy of Science and the night-lit neo-classicism of the National Library of Australia casting its reflection on the dark waters of Lake Burley Griffin. Other engaging compositions of light and texture are the photographs of steel bars and planks produced by BHP, revealing an abstract beauty in an otherwise dull and mundane subject.

Not all of the photographs are interesting as photographic compositions and reflect more of a need to represent the range of images held in the archive. For instance, the image of the CSR Board, 1977, hold less interest as compositions than the two photographs facing it which show examples of CSR's advertising angles on the dietary benefits of consuming sugar products. In this regard it is a pity that few records relating to the commissioning of Dupain's work for the Commonwealth Government have been located to help give the photographs a more meaningful context. As Joanna Parker laments in her introduction, it would have been fascinating to learn more about the context of Dupain's assignments, the objectives communicated to him and the reasons for engaging him on particular assignments. This means that what we see in this catalogue, and presumably in the exhibition, are images cut adrift from their original provenance, culled from discrete and separate recordkeeping systems. This does not detract from the value of the photographs as images and artistic compositions, but it does qualify their usefulness as documents of Australian social history.

Nonetheless, it is worthwhile alerting the Australian public to the existence of these kinds of image resources in collections such as those held by the NAA, particularly for well-known photographers like Dupain. The catalogue communicates that archives contain all manner of unexpected cultural material that the past has quietly bequeathed to the present, even if sometimes the picture it allows us to see remains incomplete and in need of supplementation from other resources.

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