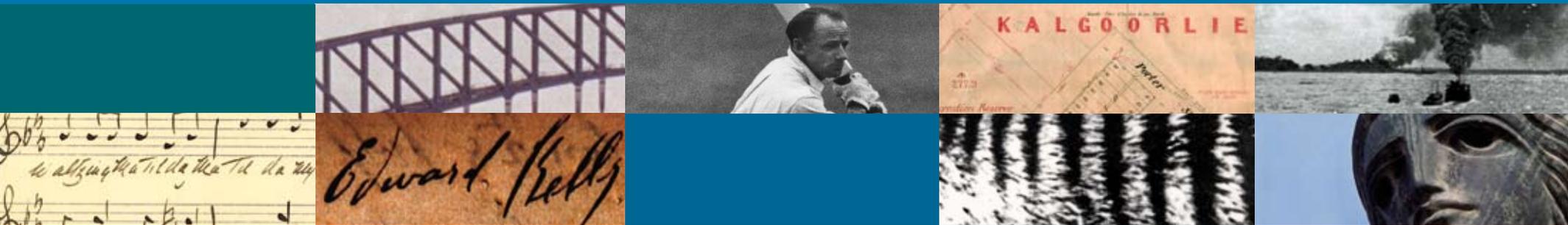


# Archives matter!



education

FUTURE

stories

IDENTITY

ENVIRONMENT

access

memory

## FOREWORD

Archives hold much of our national memory and form an essential bridge between past, present and future. Amongst other things, archives record the challenges, the aspirations and the experiences of today's generation, and of the generations that have preceded us. They document our successes and our failures. They are thereby an asset which we feel a duty to preserve and to pass on for the use and benefit of our successors in time.

The following pages will show that archives have an astonishingly wide variety of uses, from education to employment to entertainment. They help to ensure that the institutions driving our complex modern society are efficient and accountable. They ground our democracy and culture, as well as our communal and personal identities.

The social, economic and technological changes of the last thirty years have many implications for archives. This revolution represents both opportunity and challenge for the many organisations that keep Australian archives.

Australian archivists have responded pragmatically and innovatively, making use of the potential of the Internet to make their resources better-known and easier to use. New technology enables connections with archives users around Australia and the world. Technology also facilitates collaboration with other cultural institutions, such as libraries, museums and galleries, to create website gateways to collections.

In our digital world it is necessary but problematic to capture and manage the records of the present. Archives do this not just because they need to safeguard the archives of the future, but also because those records are a source of essential evidence of important decisions and activities — evidence that is needed by the people and institutions of Australia today and tomorrow. Australian archivists lead the world in setting standards for electronic recordkeeping systems which capture and maintain essential information which will be useful for future generations in ways we may not be able to foresee in our present time.

Beneficial though these initiatives are, they stretch the resources of our archival organisations which have nevertheless shown an admirable capacity to cooperate across public and private, federal, state and local jurisdictions. Pooling skills and resources, they are exploring solutions that can be adapted to suit the largest public institution *and* the smallest community organisation.

We recommend this publication to those both inside and outside the profession and hope that it promotes the role of archives and archivists in our society.

Kim Eberhard  
President  
Australian Society of Archivists

Justine Heazlewood  
Convenor  
Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities

August 2007



Above: Gaol photographs of notorious Sydney madam Tilly Devine, 1925 (SRNSW: NRS 2496, 3/6007, 659)

Without archives there would be little verifiable past and mankind would be left with no more than the fleeting present and the unknowable future.

*Sir Ninian Stephen, Governor-General of Australia, International Archives Week, 1984*

Cover images: National Archives of Australia (NAA), State Records NSW (SRNSW), Public Record Office Victoria (PROV), State Records of Western Australia (SROWA), Archives Office of Tasmania (AOTAS) and Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS)

# WHAT ARE ARCHIVES ... AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

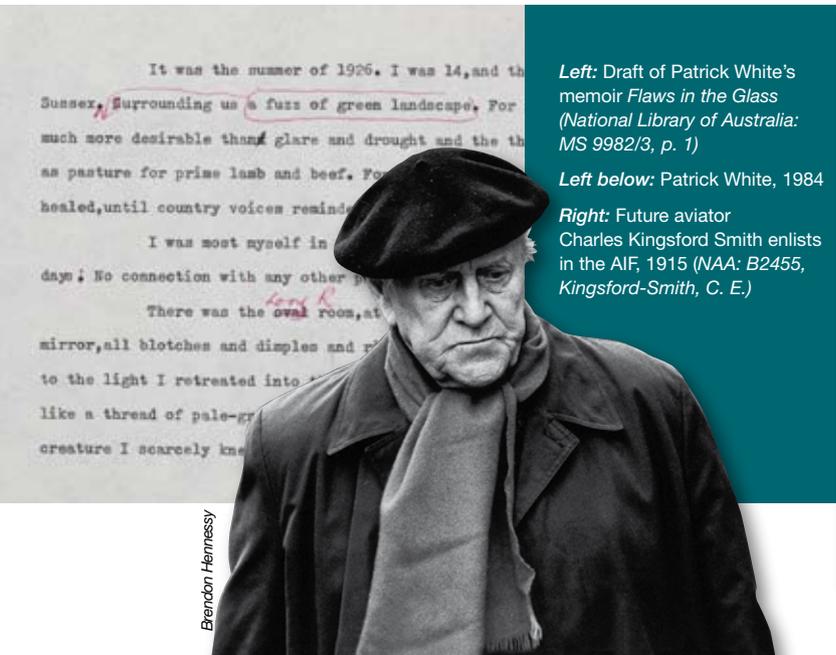
What makes archives special? Individuals and organisations have always kept records of their daily activities. Archives are the records, a small fraction of the total created, which are selected for preservation. There are many reasons for making that selection. Some archives are kept because they preserve a family's history while others make up the essential corporate memory of organisations. Archives can have value as evidence in the legal sense, they may prove a person's rights and entitlements or they help to keep governments and businesses accountable. Other archives are kept as evidence in a much broader sense, because they document the development of Australia's government, culture and economy, as well as its natural and built environments.

Archives matter because they hold much of our personal, corporate, and social memory. The word 'archives' covers a variety of records, including the diary rescued from the attic, the manuscript of the Great Australian Novel, letters, official documents (such as birth, marriage and death certificates) and files created by business or government. Archives are maintained in many formats, from paper records (documents, maps and drawings) to photographs to recordings of sound and moving images. Today more and more evidence is being captured and retained in electronic formats, including emails, digital documents and website content. All this stored memory is essential to the working of Australia's government, economy and legal system. Archives also support scientific inquiry and the care of our environment: with our universities, libraries, galleries and museums they sustain the vitality of Australian culture.



**Above:** Evidence of achievement: Melbourne University awards John Monash a doctoral degree (Monash University Archives (MUA): MON 258, 11)

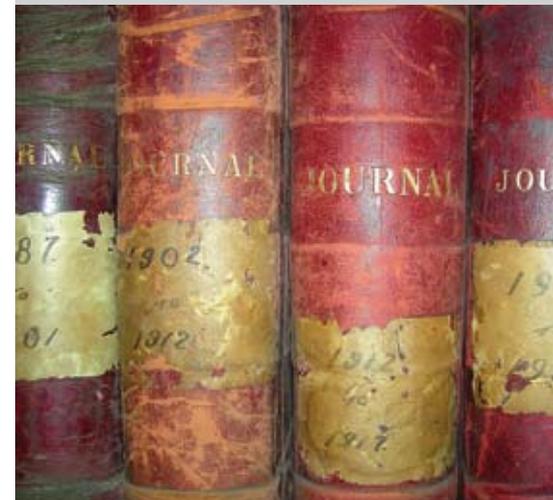
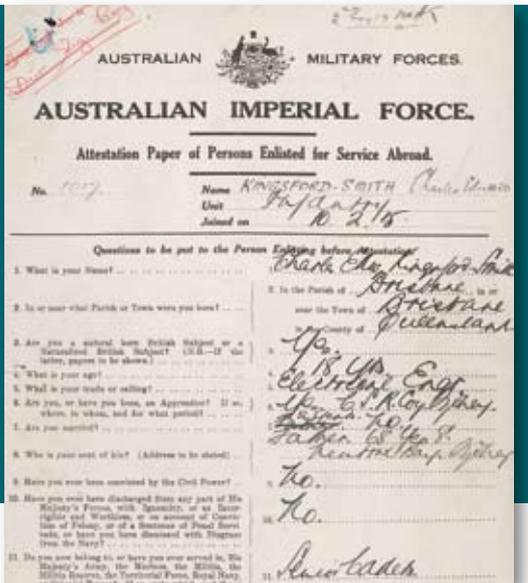
**Below:** Newcastle journals of the Australian Agricultural Company (Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC), Australian National University: 1/229/1)



**Left:** Draft of Patrick White's memoir *Flaws in the Glass* (National Library of Australia: MS 9982/3, p. 1)

**Left below:** Patrick White, 1984

**Right:** Future aviator Charles Kingsford Smith enlists in the AIF, 1915 (NAA: B2455, Kingsford-Smith, C. E.)

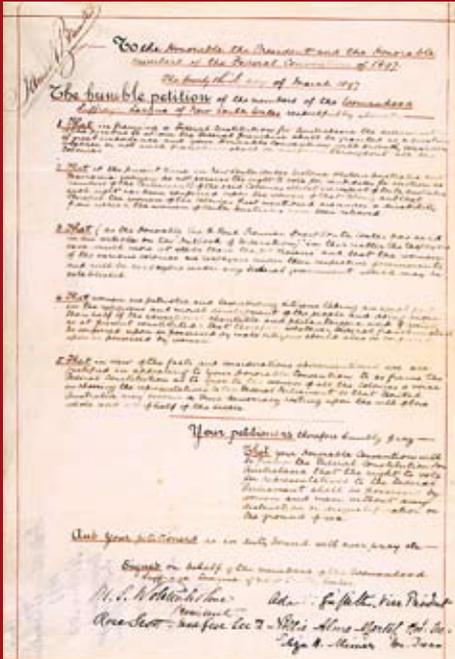


# TELLING AUSTRALIAN STORIES

Archives are part of our national heritage. But this does not mean they belong to the past. On the contrary, archives are the records we keep and use because they hold critical evidence about Australian development. They inform many current debates, including our attempts to define Australia's identity, values and place in the world.

Some archives tell the story of a developing liberal democracy: the invention of the secret ballot, campaigns for women's suffrage and the creation of the Australian Constitution. Others record something distinctive about Australia, its landscapes, people and history. Examples include Ned Kelly's Jerilderie letter, film of the 1896 Melbourne Cup, the letters of men serving at Gallipoli, the logbook of the first plane operated by Qantas, Patrick White's manuscripts and Jørn Utzon's plans for the Sydney Opera House. Sometimes these iconic archives have artistic as well as evidential value: from the sketches of nineteenth-century naturalists who captured Australia's surprising flora and fauna to the Yirrkala drawings, which detail the spiritual beliefs of the Yolgnu people in their traditional lands of North East Arnhem Land.

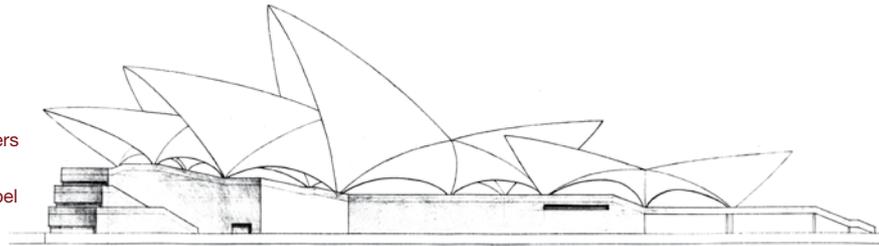
All these archives are obvious 'national treasures'. But essential evidence is also preserved in the humdrum records of daily activity, such as company ledgers, journals of pastoral stations, routine correspondence of government agencies and school registers. It is to be found in the archives of private as well as public lives. The letters of women setting up homes on an unfamiliar frontier and the diaries of desperate housewives in the suburbs are treasures too. So are family photographs, home movies and newsreels; images make a powerful connection between past and the present by showing us 'the way we were'. Archives can be the raw material of documentary and dramatic film, as well as history, biography, fiction and theatre.



**Above:** Petition of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW to the 1897 Federal Convention, signed by Rose Scott and Maybanke Wolstenholme (NAA: R216, 2)

Archives form an essential and irreplaceable part of the cultural heritage. They preserve the memory of nations ... no country belongs fully to the democratic world as long as all its inhabitants do not have the possibility of being acquainted in an objective manner with the elements of its history.

Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, July 2000



**Right:** Utzon drawing for the Sydney Opera House Competition, 1956 (SRNSW: NRS 12825, SZ112, 7)

**Below right:** Croydon High School admission registers (State Records of South Australia: GRS 2333/1)

**Below:** Sir John Eccles, joint winner of the 1963 Nobel Prize for Medicine (Australian National University Archives: ANUA 225, Eccles, J)



Roll No.	NAME OF CHILD	AGE	NAME OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN	OCCUPATION	RESIDENCE
0 112 2566	Edward James Swell	12 9	Edmund Allan Swell	Carpenter	Post Office Croydon
0 112 2567	Robert Gordon Swell	11 9	Edmund Allan Swell	Shoemaker	Edmund Road Croydon
0 112 2568	William Frederick James Swell	10 9	Henry F. Swell	Laborer	Hillmanto 1903
0 112 2569	Mare Swell	9 9	Edmund Allan Swell	Lord Clerk	112 St Croydon
0 112 2570	Bernard Gordon Swell	7 9	Bernard Swell	Shoemaker	Edmund Croydon



*Left: Cate Blanchett as Electra, National Institute of Dramatic Art, 1992 (SBW/NIDA Archive and Performing Arts Collection)*

*Below: Ned Kelly just before his hanging, 1880 (PROV: VPRS 515/P0, 17, p. 287)*

Marco Bok



Archives preserve the diversity of Australian lives and stories. They constitute our collective memory bank, which is maintained in many public and private organisations. Federal, state and territory governments have specialist agencies to manage the records of their decisions, actions and relations. Their archives are a mine of unexpected information, because governments have so many responsibilities and touch the lives of so many people. Universities, schools, churches, companies, councils and voluntary organisations also look after and provide access to their own archives.

Other organisations, such as university archives and state libraries, collect archives. For example, the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland focuses on the history and culture of that state, with holdings that include the papers of Xavier Herbert and David Malouf as well as the records of the Brisbane Theatre Company. Nearly every municipal library has a 'local history collection' and hundreds of historical societies preserve evidence of their communities. There are also specialist collections covering subjects from migration to women's history to business and labour.

Archives, in all their formats and locations, are a rich resource. Records that were created for quite specific official, legal, financial or personal reasons preserve a wide range of perspectives on the Australian past. Today they are open to an unexpectedly wide range of present uses.

## THE ROLE OF THE ARCHIVIST

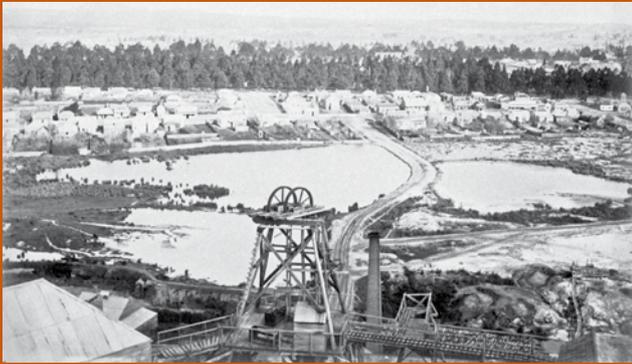
Archivists ensure that records which have value as authentic evidence of administrative, corporate, cultural and intellectual activity are made, kept and used. The work of archivists is vital for ensuring organisational efficiency and accountability and for supporting understandings of Australian life through the management of its personal, corporate and social memory. *The Archivist's Mission, Australian Society of Archivists*

The utility of archives depends on the work of archivists, who 'add value' to them by:

- *appraising* the records created by organisations, groups and individuals to ensure the creation and retention of those records that support organisational efficiency and accountability or preserve evidence of broader historical and cultural significance. Some of our earlier archives survived flood, fire and neglect more or less by chance. Today archivists define and systematically apply criteria for the identification of records having permanent value.
- *preserving* archives in all formats — from fragile paper records to degraded film to unstable electronic communications — in order to protect the evidence they hold and to keep them readable in the future.
- *arranging and describing* archives so that users may readily identify records relevant to specific interests, while also understanding their functional and administrative context. Archivists maintain information on record creators, purposes for which records were created, and their subsequent history.
- *managing access* to archives by:
  - *balancing* the public 'need to know' against the rights to privacy of record creators and record subjects
  - *providing reference services*, websites and other finding aids, which assist researchers to locate and use archives
  - *raising* the public profile of archives through exhibitions and other outreach activities.
- *advising* on the design and implementation of recordkeeping systems to ensure that records of current activity (many of them electronic records) are created, kept and remain usable through changes in software and hardware.

For information on the education and employment of archivists, see [www.archivists.org.au](http://www.archivists.org.au).

# ARCHIVES AT WORK ... IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



Above: East Ballarat township and mines from Black Hill  
(University of Melbourne Archives: UMA/1/2546)

The last decade has seen the emergence of global warming, environmental degradation, the decommissioning of nuclear power and weapons facilities, nuclear waste management, the rise of biotechnology and other issues of world wide significance — all issues that have a critical reliance on long-term or archival recordkeeping.

Gavan McCarthy, Director, Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre, University of Melbourne, 1999

Archives support research and action in many fields which require a long perspective. That perspective is essential to contemporary environmental debates. A wide variety of government, business and private records document changes in Australia's natural environment. They also preserve evidence of different approaches to using and conserving our natural resources. We can trace the impact of colonisation in maps, notebooks of government surveyors, explorers' diaries, botanical drawings, photographic collections and landscape paintings. The archives of natural history museums detail the loss of biodiversity. The private papers of landholders, surveyors, geologists and anthropologists complement records created by government agencies dealing with everything from primary production to tourism. More evidence is stored in the archives of economic and political actors, from great pastoral and mining ventures to local green groups. And archivists are collecting oral history from Indigenous communities on their relationship to their particular country.

The uses of these archives are equally varied. Mining companies tap their own corporate memory or call on government records to identify resources and raise capital. For example, large-scale mining is beginning again in the goldfields around Ballarat and Bendigo in Victoria. When it came to attracting investors, the miners realised that history trumped technology: because gold nuggets are found randomly and sparsely throughout the quartz in this region, drill samples do not give a reliable idea of its potential. So the companies used mining records and newspaper reports to construct three-dimensional maps of old workings plus estimates of gold yield.

Below: Rainfall records, Warrah pastoral station, 1879  
(NBAC: 1/278/1)

*A. A. Comp Warrah*  
Register of Rainfall during 1879. Read at 9 a.m.

Days	Rainfall		Remarks	Wind	Baromet
	Per day	Total			
January					
Febry	2	1.43	Very strong & gusty	SE	28.5
"	16	1.25	Strong gale	SE	28.5
"	21	.21	Strong	W	28.50
"	26	.15	light show	S	28.50
"	28	.17	Strong Breeze	W	28.70
March	1	.12	"	W	28.65



Left: Tasmanian tiger  
(AOTAS: AA193/1/1002)



**Above:** Dead trees on the Murray River, 1992 (NAA: A6135, K18/2/92/253)

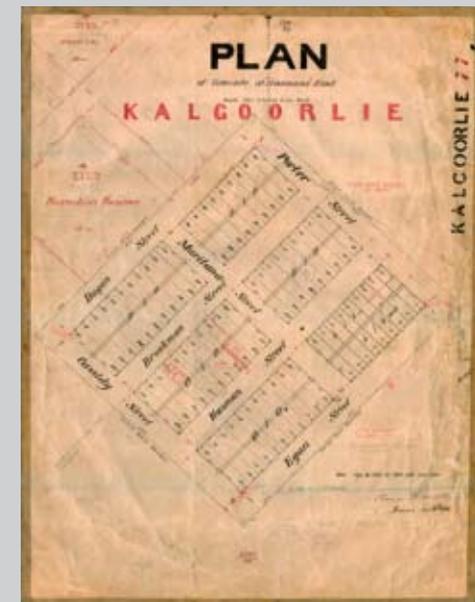
**Right:** Department of Lands and Surveys plan of Kalgoorlie (SROWA: Cons 3868,185)

Archives also support conservation of natural resources. Strategies to deal with salinity, soil and water deterioration rest on evidence of changes over time. To manage environmental flows in the Murray-Darling Basin, we need information on the river's naturally unpredictable flows and on the impact of diverting water for human use. In Northern Australia too, researching the health of the landscape requires a historical dimension. Maps, plans, photographs and diaries track changes in vegetation, which inform decisions on sustainable development.

Australia's meteorological archives help demonstrate the pace and extent of climate change. Records began when early colonists tried to make sense of their unfamiliar environment by noting temperature, rainfall and wind direction. By the end of the nineteenth century observations were being made from pastoral stations, post offices, and lighthouses from Wilsons Promontory to Rottnest Island. The records painstakingly collected by colonial officials and volunteers have been added to by the Bureau of Meteorology and are part of the data used in computer modelling of global climate change. More immediately, they underpin studies of Australian phenomena, such as bushfires, floods and especially the droughts that have punctuated our history. Researching rainfall trends in the world's driest continent depends on reliable long-term data. Original records are one foundation of current research into the many factors affecting our rainfall. Other archives — photographs, farmers' diaries and government reports — reinforce the importance of this work by documenting the social and economic devastation caused by droughts.

As a Local Studies Librarian for an inner metropolitan area, which still had significant areas of remnant bushland, I worked with the Shire's Environmental Officer to develop conservation plans ... and also to identify native species of flora that were perhaps no longer in evidence, which might successfully be reintroduced ... The Shire had a series of aerial photographs ... which dated from 1936 ... and had been updated every ten years or so. These photographs enabled us to identify vegetation cover and density, and provided a focus for the research.

*Lise Summers, State Records of Western Australia, 2006*



# ARCHIVES AT WORK ... IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The Mitchell Library has a collection of photographs and architectural drawings to which we refer on a regular basis. A good example of the utility of the resource is demonstrated by the library's records of Culwalla Chambers, which from 1912 until 1960 was the tallest building in Sydney. From Spain Cosh and Minnett's original architectural drawings ... we were able to determine the detail of the original shop fronts, detail of the tenant directory board, the general arrangement of the ground floor and the type of stone cladding below the awning.

*John Graham, Sydney architect, 2006*

Archives are part of the working lives of engineers, architects and town planners. They consult original surveys, plans, technical reports, photographs and films, which stay relevant during the lifetime of infrastructure. Most of these essential archives are kept by public utilities or government agencies, which also hold the history of public buildings, from post offices to hospitals and gaols. The importance of such stored memory is obvious after disasters, such as the 2003 Canberra bushfires and the collapse of Hobart's Tasman Bridge in 1975. Engineers charged with rebuilding the bridge could call up a mass of documentation on its construction.

In less dramatic circumstances, archives support decisions that affect the way we live, work and move in the built environment. Archives held by local authorities (such as development applications) preserve the history of individual structures and record changes to whole precincts. Access to these records saves time and money for a multi-million dollar property industry. As the first city skyscrapers age, building owners may face problems like concrete cancer or an outdated airconditioning system. State and local authorities hold the original plans and technical specifications that make changes possible. Building history is also preserved in the archives of architects and organisations from breweries to churches.

Heritage and planning laws promote the use of archives. A proposal to develop a 'heritage' site will trigger inquiries into past ownership and uses plus an assessment of its social and cultural significance. Those questions are also built into local environment plans. Answering them may involve all the records already mentioned as well as oral histories. And every aspect of planning and urban design demands the use of photographs.

**Below:** Building Sydney Harbour Bridge, 1930  
(SRNSW: Digital ID 12685\_a00704\_87300000009)

**Below:** Plan of Perth with Aboriginal place names recorded (SROWA: Cons 5499, 39)



*Elizabeth Estbergs*

**Right:** Sculpture 'Ethos' by Tom Bass,  
Civic Square, Canberra, 1959  
(ACT Territory Records Office)



## ARCHIVES AT WORK ... REINFORCING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

The Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi history and Family History Collection was set up starting with a display of my own family history and photographs in the Library ... [We] saw that a Gamilaroi history project had the potential to repair and rebuild relations between [Moree Plains Shire] Council and Moree's Aboriginal community ... The Aboriginal community of Moree saw the importance of their history and gave theirs as well. It is no wonder Moree is now the centre for Aboriginal family history where we hold approximately 7000 photographs that are not held anywhere else, and family history that numbers in the thousands ... Even farmers have opened historic records for me showing work patterns as Aboriginal people moved around the district.

*Noeline Briggs Smith, Aboriginal Research Officer, Northern Regional Library and Information Service, Moree, 2002*

**Right:** Building bridges. The National Archives presented documents relating to the case of Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda to his family in 2004. His conviction for the murder of Constable Albert McColl was overturned by the High Court in 1934, but he then disappeared. (NAA)

Archives preserve the memory of communities. In a country where a fairly small population is spread over a large landmass, a sense of place and a shared history are powerful social anchors. Across Australia schools, councils and libraries keep archives that help to define their communities. They are the raw material of local festivals, theatre and exhibitions. The biennial Barossa Vintage Festival, for example, celebrates the region's wineries and its German heritage. But history is more than an entertaining sideshow: it not only affects an area's tourist potential, but shapes attitudes towards the development of local resources. While archives promote a community's cohesion, they are also integral to debates about its future priorities.

Communities are also defined by shared ethnicity or a distinct culture. Their impulse to keep archives is generally driven by difference. The Australian Gay and Lesbian Archive is an historical and educational resource that reinforces community identity. Migrant groups seek to preserve elements of their culture of origin and evidence of their experiences in Australia. The Italian Historical Society, for example, manages the papers of Lena Santospirito. Documenting her charitable work among postwar migrants, the collection opens a window onto their problems and successes. Community identity also prompts people to *create* records, by collecting oral history. Personal testimonies record events, feelings and beliefs, providing a counterpoint to the written record.

Identity is a particularly sensitive issue for Aboriginal Australians because the culture of their communities has been disrupted, while they have been the subject of much recordkeeping by governments, churches and anthropologists. Past records remain highly relevant to current concerns. Native title claims rest on research that documents claimants' long connection to their land. Archives also help to reconstruct Aboriginal family histories and reconnect those people who were removed from their families as children. Today government archivists work with Indigenous organisations, public agencies and private archives to locate, index and make records accessible in culturally appropriate ways.



**Left:** Charlie Fun Chung, one of thousands of Chinese migrants to nineteenth-century Victorian goldfields (PROV: VPRS 515/P0, 49, folio 29)

Right: Victorian miners meet to protest licence fees before manning the Eureka stockade at Ballarat, 1854 (PROV: VPRS 5527/P0, 4)

Below: An Indian dancer performing at a National Archives Multicultural Family History Fair (NAA)



Below: An Australian Lebanese Historical Society reunion at Braidwood in 2005 (Braidwood Times)



Above: A receipt for camels, purchased by an agent of the Victorian government in India, possibly for the Burke and Wills expedition to Central Australia in 1860–61 (PROV: VPRS 1189/P0, 757, 24)

## ARCHIVES AT WORK ... REINFORCING PERSONAL IDENTITY

Attitudes to family history have changed radically since 1923 when the West Australian Under Secretary for Law wrote:

*Convict records should certainly be destroyed with the death of the convicts. I see no reasons why innocent generations in future years should be confronted with the fact that their forefathers arrived in the Colony under a life sentence (perhaps for shooting a rabbit).*

*State Records of Western Australia, 3621, 53/1975*

Today convict records are an invaluable resource for family historians, who use them to follow an ancestor's colonial career. From convict indents they can even find out details such as eye colour, complexion and tattoos. In 2007 the convict records of Australia were placed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

The question of personal identity is a magnet that draws people to archives: they want to know more about who they are and where they come from. This passion to locate ourselves in time, place and community drives the ever-growing interest in family history. A project like the Migrant Welcome Walls at Fremantle involves relatively recent arrivals who have to verify details of their landing at Fremantle before their names can be inscribed. But the simple question 'How did I get here?' often sets off an investigation of a family's experiences in a new country. Other Australians work back through several generations, perhaps finding gold diggers, bushrangers or convicts on the family tree. Following the clues can draw people into a labyrinth of diaries, letters, probate records and the archives of hospitals and schools. Their personal discoveries make aspects of national history more immediate and relevant. Family historians are the largest single group of archives users in Australia.

For some people, searching archives has a more practical significance. Medical records, for example, may hold clues to risks that run in particular families. Applicants for citizenship check information about their arrival in Australia, while proof of age or status may be needed to qualify for a pension. Child migrants, who were brought to Australia during the twentieth century, comb the archives of governments, churches and adoption agencies for information about the families they left behind. Those records may provide a route map to bring lost relatives together. Archives also support litigation. For example, union membership records may prove that someone worked in an asbestos-affected environment, and strengthen claims for compensation. Whether searches are prompted by necessity or curiosity, finding archives can be a life-changing experience.



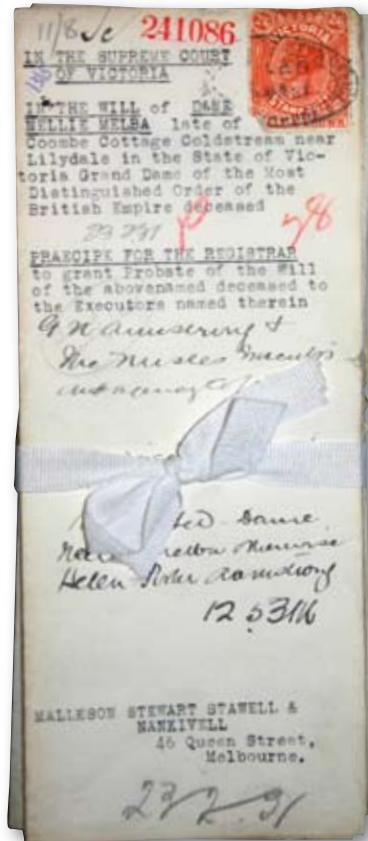
*Far left:* Convict record for Robert Graham who arrived per *Norfolk*, 28 Aug 1835 (AOTAS: CON18/1/18)

*Left:* Professional model Lucy Kiraly celebrates her new identity as a Bachelor of Arts graduate, 1971 (MUA: MON 335, 1862)

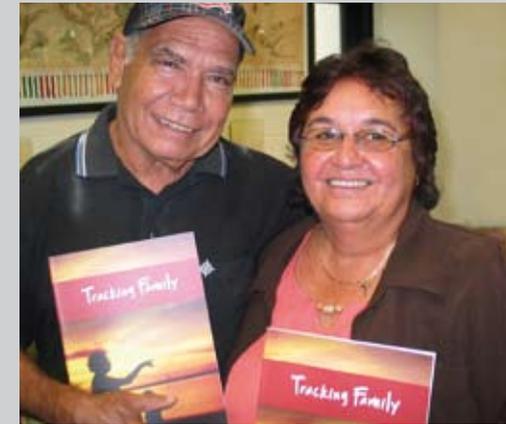
**Right:** New immigrants to Brisbane, 1960. Passenger records provide valuable evidence for family historians.

(Queensland State Archives (QSA): ID435950)

**Below:** Dame Nellie Melba's will (PROV: PRS 7591/P2, 845, 241/86)



**Below:** Sophie Stokes, member of the National Archives' Bringing Them Home name indexing project, with Jim Anderson at the Darwin launch of *Tracking Family*, a guide to Aboriginal records relating to the Northern Territory



What surprises have been revealed in archives, parish records and newspapers from Australia and overseas ... [They] have revealed the insane, the clever, the wealthy and the poor — from a hopeless horse contractor who died of typhoid at Wagga, a clergyman with a paternity suit lodged against him, a successful emancipist, a paymaster with a colourful 1812 divorce and an 18th century Loyalist American privateer from a wealthy Virginia family.

Susan Tracey, family historian, 2006

# ARCHIVES AND EDUCATION

Archives play an important part in formal education, from primary school to the postgraduate degree. Teachers and students use records in school projects, on subjects from the geography of the neighbourhood to national politics: evaluating primary sources helps to develop critical intelligence. As part of their professional education, town planners, engineers and architects learn to navigate water and sewerage plans, local authority files, and land titles. Students of history, anthropology and politics explore an array of records — official and private, written, oral and visual — to reconstruct Australian stories.

Archives also support public education in a much broader sense. Learning is not confined to formal courses and institutions; it is a process that engages people in different ways at all stages of their lives. Australian archives provide many opportunities for such informal learning. Researchers use the records not because they need to pass an exam, but because they are interested in a family, place, or pastime. Members of Generation X consult school records to organise a reunion. Model train enthusiasts want to check engine designs to build accurate replicas. Bush regenerators, who spend their weekends clearing weeds from local gullies, need information on native species to replant. People often start with a single question, such as ‘When was my house built?’ but records can encourage them to put their question in context and to ask new ones. The learning power of archives lies in the fact that using them is an interactive process. That process can also build new communities by connecting researchers to others with similar interests. Many archives rely on volunteers who have found their own research rewarding enough to join projects indexing records to make them more accessible.

**Below:** Exhibitions are an accessible resource for schoolchildren, including these students from Merici College, Canberra (NAA)



**Below:** Lifelong learning. Christine Yeats of State Records NSW talks about accessing government records at a public forum on the NSW-Victorian border



**Below:** Finding the way in. Participants in the National Library's 2004 Multicultural Documentary Heritage Workshop learn to access family migration records at the National Archives





[Using archives] made it far more interesting — took Federation out of the dry and dusty compartment in my brain!

*Teacher's comment in evaluation of National Archives' 1901 and All That teachers kit*

**Left:** Reaching new audiences. Grandkids Day at the National Archives invites children to combine fun and education as they explore exhibitions

**Below:** Handling the 'real thing'. A white-gloved researcher in the Darwin search room of the Northern Territory Archives Service



**Right:** Ross Jones used plans from the National Archives for his model of HMAS Wyatt Earp

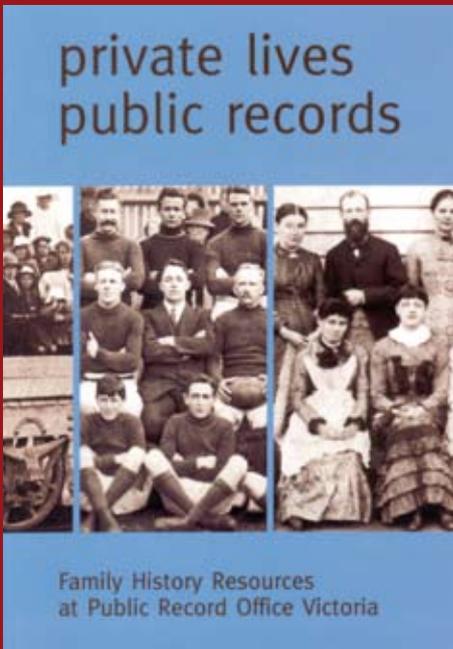


## ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE ... MANAGING ACCESS

Below: The National Library's *Picture Australia* website, gateway to pictorial collections across the country



Below: A Public Record Office Victoria guide specially designed for genealogists



The rich potential of Australian archives brings the question of access into focus. How can we keep improving public knowledge and use of these resources? Until recently, distance has been a real barrier to archival research in Australia. Archives are unique records: that characteristic, along with their organisational or cultural significance, is what makes them archives. They have traditionally been kept and used in distinct locations. Australian archives are unusually decentralised. The National Archives has offices in each state and territory holding records generated there, while some state governments maintain regional repositories. Local loyalties have kept many archives in the areas to which they relate. As a result it has not always been easy to know who holds which records and where. On the other hand most large collections are city-based, which means that researchers outside those cities have been disadvantaged.

Today the Internet is revolutionising access, as Australian archivists exploit new technologies to increase public awareness of the range of records available, their locations and their uses. Government archives and many libraries have online searching facilities, allowing computer users throughout Australia (and the world) to identify relevant records, often by means of a simple keyword search. To make their collections easier to use, archivists have also created guides showing which of their records deal with particular topics or communities. Meanwhile organisations across the country are publicising their collections with virtual and real exhibitions, workshops, open days and education kits.

Archives themselves are being digitised. Family historians on home computers can now access immigration registers and indexes to track relatives. The National Archives operates a unique service of digitisation on demand for the benefit of distant researchers, who can ask the Archives to load copies of selected records onto its databases. Other organisations are putting many images and iconic archives online. The State Library of South Australia makes its Bradman Collection available to cricket fans around the world. State Records NSW has digitised the *Registry of Flash Men*, the extraordinary journal of a police commissioner observing Sydney's underworld in the 1840s. Online exhibitions, such as Queensland State Archives' *Fire, Flood, Famine*, draw attention to the diversity of Australian collections. Technology not only breaks down barriers between archives and users, it can make connections between different collections. For example, the *Australia's Prime Ministers* website informs the public about relevant records in archives and libraries throughout Australia and overseas. And the National Library's *Picture Australia* site provides a single access point to digitised picture collections from other libraries, museums and archives.



Left: Online search facilities like the State Records NSW *Archives Investigator* are developing rapidly



**Above:** A National Archives staff member digitises documents on demand for remote researchers

**Right:** Students visit the search room at Queensland State Archives



Many enquiries can now be conducted online: the website of the Australian War Memorial provides a Research a Person option, which gives people access to its biographical databases to track individual service histories. But streamlined services also carry the risk that technology may *narrow* public expectations of archives; what is easily available on the web does not represent the richness of the collections. Although the National Archives, for example, has produced over 18 million digital images of documents, this represents a small fraction of their holdings. Digitisation programs are constrained by costs; even the largest organisations have to do more with less, driving their public and private dollars further. The Public Record Office Victoria is indicating one way forward by collaborating with the Genealogical Society of Utah to digitise its collection of wills and probates. But the idea that whole collections will be accessible at the click of a mouse is still a mirage.

Archivists have to balance competing imperatives: to meet customer demand for highly specific information while making the full range of archives known and accessible. Computerised indexes, guides and virtual exhibitions are essential to this balancing act. But not all researchers are computer literate, so reference services must cater to different constituencies. As outreach activities invite the public to use archives, more people are coming through real or virtual doors. Their needs reinforce the core responsibilities of the archivist; beneath all the user-friendly initiatives lies the bedrock work of appraising, arranging, describing and preserving archives which makes them accessible.

Market research suggested that Australians treated archives rather like wilderness areas — not many of us went to see them but we liked to know they were there.

*Hilary Golder, 'Changes and Choices, 1994–2004',  
National Archives of Australia website*

## ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE ... SUSTAINING SERVICES

Where are the archives of multicultural Australia to be found? ... In mainstream collecting institutions cultural diversity is most likely to be represented in pictorial and oral history collections, rather than in the private records groups of papers of individuals or community organisations. The documentary record of the larger, older established community groups such as the Greek, Italian and Jewish communities seems to be reasonably secure ... [But] the Chinese community [and] Arabic and Vietnamese speaking populations seem to be notable omissions.

*Margy Burn, National Library of Australia, 2002*

Raising the profile of archives raises public expectations about archival services. Ideally organisations at national, state, territory, regional and local level would keep and collect archives, so that every aspect of Australian development is documented without gaps or overlaps. If we imagine those organisations as a network, however, the net has some fraying strands. When it comes to records in the public sector, Australia has a firm statutory framework. Federal, state and territory government records are covered by legislation mandating the safe custody, preservation and accessibility of archives. In the last ten years the states and territories have brought local authorities, public hospitals and universities into this regime. Previously, these organisations had varied widely in their commitment to maintaining archives, but legislation now requires more resources for record management and archival programs. It has also reinforced the responsibility of state and territory government archivists to advise those authorities on identifying, storing and cataloguing their archives. They may sometimes take local archives into custody, preferably into the nearest regional repository.

Outside the public sector, there are gaps in the record of Australian experience. Collecting institutions such as university archives and state and national libraries have taken the lead in preserving the archives of non-government organisations and the private papers of individuals. Maintaining the corporate memory of business — and ensuring public understanding of its operations — has often become the responsibility of collecting institutions. Many companies have decided that keeping their own archives is not cost-effective, despite their contribution to efficiency and accountability.

**Below:** Researchers crowd the joint National Archives and Public Record Office Victoria reading room in North Melbourne



**Below:** Volunteers at the Ballarat Archives Centre study early photographs of the region (PROV)



Ben O'Loughlin





**Above and right:** Archives repositories provide optimum conditions for the survival of paper records, but now archives are also developing digital repositories to maintain information in electronic formats (NAA)

The financial gulf between large and small organisations means that provision of services is uneven. While state libraries have access to private sponsorship as well as public funding, local historical societies often rely on a handful of devoted volunteers to find, catalogue and make archives available. This limits their capacity to maintain an effective local memory: many collections have omissions or redundancies. And they are unlikely to be held in the airconditioned humidity-controlled buildings that protect archives. Larger organisations are, however, working to bridge the gulf by providing advice and resources to the archival minnows. The National Library, assisted by the National Archives among others, makes Community Heritage Grants that help historical societies, local libraries, Indigenous and ethnic groups to manage and preserve their documentary heritage. The Library provides starter kits to guide community groups in collecting, cataloguing and conserving records. The Public Record Office Victoria, the National Archives and the Australian Society of Archivists also collaborate in an Archival Support Program. Workshops advise local groups on acquisition, arrangement and description, preservation and storage as well as the use of computers in small collections. The circulation of expertise and funds from larger to smaller organisations helps keep community archives alive.

Business is under-documented in an historical sense and under represented in archives, both in terms of holdings and professional practice ... apart from a handful of initiatives, little has happened to promote the identification, collection and use of business archives.

*Bruce Smith, business archivist, 2004*

# ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE ... MAXIMISING RESOURCES

Below: Digitisation makes early documents such as this conditional pardon signed by Governor Macquarie in 1820 available online (SRNSW: NRS 906, 4/1124)



Specialist programs strengthen the archival network, by collecting records relating to under-represented groups or neglected subjects and informing the public where relevant records may be found. The University of Melbourne maintains *Bright Sparcs*, an online database of over 4000 people involved in the development of science, technology and medicine in Australia, with links to related websites, archival and published sources. The Australian Women's Archives Project (initiated by the National Foundation for Australian Women) assists individuals and organisations to find, protect and promote records. It maintains its own online register that holds information on women and their organisations with links to websites and to the institutions that keep their archives. The Australian Trade Union Archives website and the online Guide to Australian Business Records draw together published and unpublished information on the history of trade unions and businesses, providing direct links to the websites of the institutions which hold the originals.

Such projects pool resources and skills within the archival sector, but they also depend on attracting outside funds. There is scope for more private sponsorship of archive programs: Macquarie Bank, for example, is currently supporting the digitisation of Governor Lachlan Macquarie's papers in the Mitchell Library at the State Library of New South Wales. The potential for productive partnerships with industry, government and community groups is recognised by the Australian Research Council whose grants 'fertilise' archival research and development, including Monash University's development of a 'clever metadata' model for electronic recordkeeping to ensure accessibility of government information in the future. Another collaborative project involves universities, the Public Record Office Victoria and Indigenous groups. It is pioneering an archival service that will be technically and culturally responsive to the needs of dispersed Indigenous communities who put a high value on oral memory. Grants also support innovations like the Virtual Room at the Melbourne Museum. Funded by the state government, imaging technology is taking interactivity to a new level, allowing visitors to 'explore' Mars or the human brain in stereoscope. The experiment opens up exciting possibilities for presenting the scientific and historical record.

Although there are many examples of such innovative and collaborative projects, there is still a need for sustained and effectively used ongoing resources to improve services and to safeguard the future of archives in the digital age.

Archives matter!



Far left: The Australian Trade Union Archives website developed in partnership by the University of Melbourne Archives and the ANU Archives was supported by an Australian Research Council grant

Left: Online resources direct users to where archives are located. 'She's Game' about Australian sportswomen is an online exhibition of the Australian Women's Archives Project

# MAINTAINING THE MEMORY OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

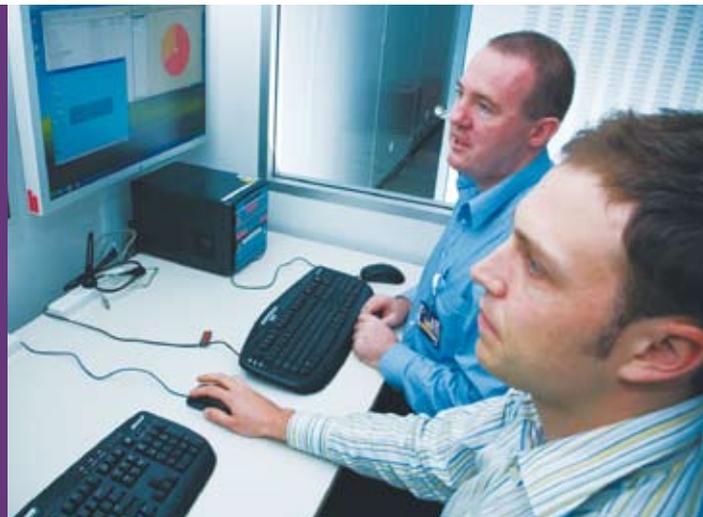
How can we maintain our corporate and social memory in an age of rapid technological and cultural change? Government recordkeeping — that essential element of the nation's archival infrastructure — has been affected by privatisation, downsizing of public services and the adoption of computer-based office systems and the popularity of the Internet. New ways of working and communicating bring new problems. Archivists quickly recognised that emails and text messages blur the line between a private communication and a public document: without well-designed recordkeeping systems, decisions that affect government accountability and information of historical and cultural significance could end up in the Recycle Bin. Even when that evidence is retained, the accelerating obsolescence of equipment and the sheer bulk of available information might make it unusable.

Australian archivists responded creatively to the challenges posed by records that are 'born digital'. In the 1990s they played a leading role in framing standards, policies and guidelines for recordkeeping in an electronic environment. In fact the international records management standard (ISO 15489) is largely based on one first developed in Australia (AS 4390). Because good recordkeeping is now recognised as a foundation of good governance, many Australian jurisdictions have passed new public records laws that extend the responsibilities of government archives into current recordkeeping. These changes reinforce the archivist's role in developing 'best practice' in the creation and maintenance of present and future public records. Increasingly archivists are expected to be involved in all aspects of recordkeeping. To make the best use of their collective resources, national, state and territory government archives from Australia and New Zealand formed



*Right:* Increasingly records are 'born digital' and need to be managed in electronic form into the future (NAA)

*Below:* The first plenary meeting of contributors to the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative, Canberra, 8 March 2004



Paper may still be with us but, to an ever-increasing extent, it is the detritus of electronic communication. Every day we work and think on email, type word-processed documents, calculate on spreadsheets and read websites ... Future use is threatened by the very speed with which computers are changing. So relentless are the cycles of innovation, and so rapidly does hardware and software become obsolete, that the digital archive is in danger of becoming a crypt for dead technology.

*Peter Shergold, Secretary,  
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2004*



*Above:* Digitisation is one way of preserving fragile material, along with repair and protective measures such as climate-controlled storage, acid-free containers and low-temperature vaults for audiovisual records. Evidence held in unstable formats (such as acetate-based film) can also be 'migrated' to newer technologies. (QSA)

*Right:* Archivists can now offer online access to information, either through scanning hard-copy records or providing direct access to 'born digital' records (QSA)

the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA). Its brief includes promoting consistency in the management of public records throughout these jurisdictions. In 2004 the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative was launched in order to pool resources and expertise towards a uniform Australasian approach to making, keeping and using digital records of government activities. One project aims to develop common specifications for the hardware and software required to preserve the digital record and keep it accessible to future users. Such archival initiatives, although they are being pioneered in the public sector, will produce tools for use across a whole range of Australasian organisations. It is not just government archives that are becoming involved in current recordkeeping. For example, archivists in universities and large private sector organisations are increasingly becoming managers of current as well as historical records.

The role of the archivist is changing in the twenty-first century. Traditionally records were appraised as they reached the end of their immediate administrative utility. That was when archivists usually took custody of the records that had lasting value. This model was unproblematic when most activity was recorded on paper, a relatively stable format. But once millions of transactions were being conducted electronically, early intervention was needed to ensure that they were documented and that essential information was 'captured' and retained in a record system. In designing such systems organisations have to analyse their functions and activities, to decide what records need to be created and how long they should be kept. To make that decision they have to recognise that their records may have cultural value to future generations as well as their more obvious operational relevance. In other words the appraisal of records is built into the design; just as records are 'born digital', some are 'born archives'. The rigorous analysis needed to build these new systems demands the intellectual skills of the archivist. Far from sidelining them, the revolution in electronic recordkeeping has brought archivists to the centre of the action. They are still the essential interpreters between information technology specialists, creators of records and the public who will use the archives.



# ARCHIVES IN AUSTRALIA

Just some of the over 500 archives in Australia ...

## Commonwealth Government

National Archives of Australia  
National Film and Sound Archive  
National Library of Australia Manuscript Collection  
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Studies  
Australian War Memorial Research Centre  
Australian Broadcasting Corporation Archives

## State Government

State Records NSW  
Public Record Office Victoria  
Queensland State Archives  
State Records of South Australia  
State Records Office of Western Australia  
Archives Office of Tasmania  
ACT Territory Records Office  
Northern Territory Archives Service

## State Library Manuscript Collections

State Library of NSW, Mitchell and Dixon Libraries  
State Library of Victoria, Australian Manuscript Collection  
State Library of Queensland, John Oxley Library  
State Library of SA, South Australiana Collections  
State Library of WA, JS Battye Library of West  
Australian History  
State Library of Tasmania  
ACT Heritage Library  
Northern Territory Library, Northern Territory Collection

## Local Government

Large city councils usually maintain their own archives, eg the City of Sydney and Adelaide City Council. Other local government archives are held in state records offices and their regional repositories.

## Churches

Many churches maintain their own archives, eg Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney, Uniting Church in Australia, Lutheran Church of Australia, and the Catholic Church

Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Church archives are also held in manuscript collections of the National Library of Australia, state and territory libraries, and universities with regional collections.

## Universities

Most Australian universities maintain their own archives. Some also collect archives:

### ***Business and Labour Archives***

Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University  
University of Melbourne Archives  
University of Wollongong Archives

### ***Prime Ministerial Archives***

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library, Curtin University  
of Technology  
Alfred Deakin Prime Ministerial Library, Deakin University  
Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Library, University of  
South Australia  
The Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney  
Fraser Collection, University of Melbourne Archives

### ***Regional and Local Archives***

Fryer Library, University of Queensland  
Charles Sturt University Regional Archives  
University of New England Regional Archives  
James Cook University Archives

## Schools

Some schools maintain their own archives, eg Canberra Girls Grammar School and Kedron State High School (Qld). Private school archives are also held in manuscript collections of the National Library of Australia and state and territory libraries. Public school archives are also held in state records offices.

## Businesses

Some large businesses maintain their own archives, eg BHP-Billiton and John Fairfax, and most banks, eg Westpac Banking Corporation. Business archives are also collected by the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University (eg CSR Ltd, Australian Agricultural Company and Burns Philp), the University of Melbourne (eg Comalco Ltd, Western Mining Corporation

and Rio Tinto), state manuscript libraries (eg Australian Manuscript Collection, State Library of Victoria – Coles Myer), and universities with regional collections.

## Professional, Political and Cultural Organisations

Some organisations maintain their own archives, eg Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the Queensland Performing Arts Trust. The archives of many organisations are collected by the National Library, state and territory libraries, and university archives. Union archives are collected by the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne, state manuscript libraries, some state records offices, and universities with regional collections.

## Hospitals

Some hospitals maintain their own archives, eg Royal Perth Hospital and Alfred Hospital, Melbourne. Private hospital archives are also held in the manuscript collections of National Library of Australia and state and territory libraries. Public hospital archives are also held in state records offices.

## Local and Regional Collections

There are local history collections in municipal libraries and separate local heritage collections such as the Geelong Heritage Centre. Many historical societies hold archives relating to their local area, eg Queensland Family History Society, Clare Regional History Group, and the Royal Western Australian Historical Society. Some university archives also collect archives of their local region.

## Subject-based Collections

Some archives collections relate to particular groups of people or particular subjects, such as the Estonian Archives in Australia, the Australian Gay and Lesbian Archives, the Australian Academy of Science's Basser Library, the National AIDS Archive Collection at the Australian National University, and the Melbourne Cricket Club Archives.

For the latest statistics and information about archives in Australia visit the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities at [www.caara.org.au](http://www.caara.org.au) and the Australian Society of Archivists at [www.archivists.org.au](http://www.archivists.org.au).

Archives make it possible for us to connect with the wonderful depth and richness of human experience — the sense that somehow the souls of human beings now departed can yet resonate through the documentary evidence of their lives and their relationships and activities.

*Paul Santamaría, Chairman, National Archives of Australia Advisory Council, 2007*

education

FUTURE

stories

IDENTITY

ENVIRONMENT

access

memory