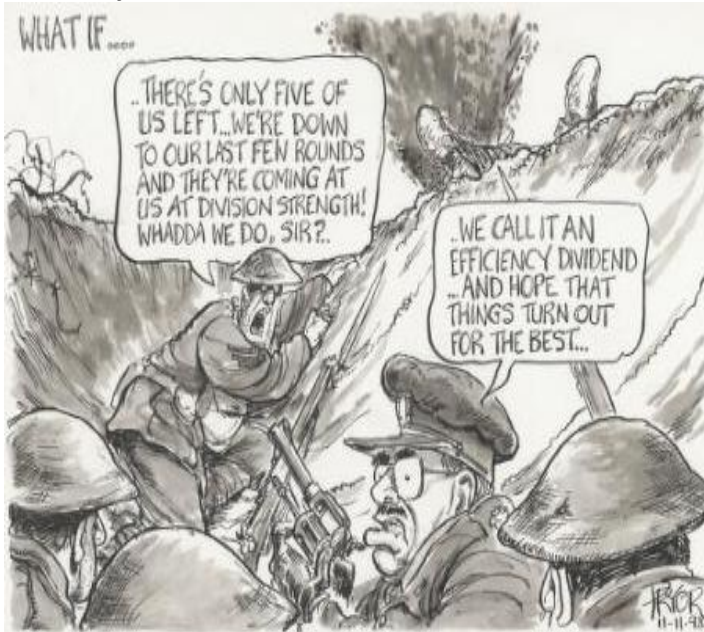




## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Efficiency and other forms of nourishment ...



### **How archives end**

Tales of loss, destruction, or dispersal ... and of survival.

**2017, June 28: Check out “SMH Photo Archive for sale” ... p.3**

Fairfax photo archives.

**2017, July 5: ASA response to changes at the State Records Office WA p.5**

Assault on State Archives WA.

**2017, December 10: Destruction of SMH archives p.7**

Up for auction.

**2018, March 5: Two items p.8**

ABC Sound & Reference Libraries closed in three States. NAA loses 40 jobs over 2 years.

**2018, May 29: ASA Submission ... Canberra's National Institutions p.8**

What is the best way for us to advocate? What are we advocating for?

**2018, June 27: Fairfax Photographic Archive p.11**

It's being broken up and sold off piece-meal.

**2018, July 16: NAA spends up big p.11**

Nearly \$1m in one year defending disputed access decisions.

**2018, October 15: For things to remain the same ... p.13**

Problem-definition in planning a strategy for survival.

**2018, November 26: Follow the money p.14**

Analysis of budgetary consequences of amalgamation.

**2019, March 9: Fairfax Photographs p.14**

Canberra Museum & Gallery purchases original prints” relating to Canberra.

**2019, May 15: Funding for Archives? p.16**

Not much to see in policies of the major parties.

**2019, May 17: You're voting for who? p.16**

But have a look at the Pirate Party.



**2019, July 18: Update on advocacy - SROWA p.17**

The incredible shrinking, disappearing records office.

**2019, September 25: Thomas Cook Archives p.22**

No protocols; no hope.

**2019, November 18: How collections end p.26**

Tasmanian National Trust. Sulpicians in Canada.

**2019, December 8: Where will all the archives be? p.28**

Ministers' offices and the public record. Ministerial advisers.

**2020, January 14: NAA website p.32**

Disappearing Fact Sheets.

**2020, March 19: Safe Haven p.33**

Shepton Mallet Prison used to store documents from PRO in WWII.

**2020, April 3: Something else to worry about p.33**

The ground is sinking under our feet.

**2020, November 5: What would you do .. if independently wealthy? p.35**

Private collectors buying NASA images and Fairfax photo archives too.

**2021, January 2: Form vs function p.37**

Is a bar on the roof of the NSW State Library a step too far?

**2021, March 8: Delenda est biblioteca p.38**

Destruction of libraries.

**2021, March 13: Tune Review released p.39**

What are NAA's national functions?

**2022, June 9: So it goes p.41**

ABC abolishes librarians and archivists. Replaced by "content navigators".

**2022, June 10: ABC axing jobs p.42**

Archives/library displaced by Content Digital Archive (CoDA).

**2022, July 19: Broadcast archives p.43**

More on ABC Archives. Archives of *The Guardian* (UK).

**2025, February 8: Knowing how we stand p.45**

Archivist of US fired. Are we now living in a world destabilized by caprice?

**2025, March 17: Fwd [Arcan-I] Defunding IMLS p.51**

Trump defunds Institute of Museum & Library Services (US).

**2018, January 8: Archives without archives p.53**

Yeilding to an indigenous way of understanding archives.

**Catastrophe in NSW**

State Archives swallowed up by Museums of History. Why not the Mitchell too?

**2019, August 22: Imagining p.54**

What's in store for NSW State Archives. Read on ...

**2020, July 28: 'Just nuts': Historian decries archives merger proposal p.56**

Assault on NSW State Archives – all the usual suspects, and then some.

**2020, October 17: Report tabled – State Records Act ... review p.68**

The curse of Janus.



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

### **2022, December 31: Leadership vacuum in NSW p.72**

What happened next. I am reminded of similar takeovers in Victoria and NZ.



### **Neglect, Decay, Efficiency Cuts, and Some New Funding**

A lengthy and sorry tale of woe and confusion; with some bright spots.

### **2022, September 16: Neglecting Libraries & Archives p.76**

Funding. Misallocation of resources. Government policies. Measuring results.



## **How Archives End**

### **2017, June 28: Check out “SMH Photo Archive for sale” on Archives Live**

#### **Archives Live**

Australian Society of Archivists Inc. - Keeping Archives, Keeping Records

**Check out the blog post 'SMH Photo Archive for Sale'**

Blog post added by [Peter Collins](#):

[ASA](#)  
Administrator-

For those who have subscription access to The Australian... Use the direct link here or follow this link from the Media page: Media News

**Blog post link:**

[SMH Photo Archive for Sale](#)

#### **About Archives Live**

Keeping Archives, Keeping Records

2672 members

1297 photos

286 videos

817 discussions

1173 Events

1581 blog posts

To control which emails you receive on Archives Live, [click here](#)

Following [this story](#) would make a good comprehension test for Peter Dutton to use on hapless immigrants. Disclaimer: I was a user of this archive in younger days. My recollection is that (for at least more recent years) you made your selection from small prints mounted in big albums on open display or available “from the back” if called for. There were some thematic volumes but most were chronological. Prints to your specification were then generated from negatives held in storage referenced from the small prints in the volumes. The timeline seems to be as follows:

- **2013:** Fairfax Media “gave” the archive to US businessman John Rogers who relocated it to Arkansas with a promise to digitize w/o charge. He would retain ownership of the “hard copies”. What hard copies? Under the deal, Rogers could sell “originals” (what originals?) on eBay. Fairfax retained the negatives and copyright. Rogers’ company collapsed and the First Bank of Arkansas came to own the photographs.
- **“at about this time”** (what time?): Daniel Miller bought the SMH archive from receivers (what receivers?) He says he wants to “get these things back to Australia into the hands of institutions”. He has already sold some pictures to the Bradman Museum and is “spruiking” to other GLAM institutions to buy job lots. He says “I’m not selling copyright, I’m selling pieces of paper” (but if Fairfax still holds copyright, he couldn’t sell anything else). The article states that Fairfax “has



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

retained copyright to images by its photographers taken after 1955.” How does that work? Did non-staff photographers retain their copyright? Why 1955?

- **2017:** Fairfax expresses no regrets and are “pleased the *SMH* photo archives have been successfully digitized, returned and preserved in perpetuity”. Returned to where? It’s not clear from the article that the archive, now in Miller’s hands, has been entirely digitized. It seems unlikely that the negatives (which we assume Fairfax still holds) will be entirely digitized any time soon.

Should we be concerned that the archive is now in the hands of someone intending to break it up into small lots and sell it piece-meal to GLAM institutions who should know better? Should we instead take the view that the “originals” (what originals?) now held in the US and Bowral are no archive at all, just a tatty work tool of no archival value?

Assuming the negatives are still with Fairfax, on what terms and conditions are they available for public access? What long term disposition plan does Fairfax have for them once their current business use is ended? Will they ever be mounted in their entirety onto [Fairfax Photos](#)? Will they ever be lodged (in their entirety) with a proper archives?

Meanwhile, what of the American digitization project? Are those “originals” a complete copy of all the negatives supposedly retained by Fairfax? Have they been digitized in their entirety? On what terms and conditions can public access to those digitisations be obtained? If Fairfax retains copyright (for at least some) does it allow public access to digitisations to be provided by someone else? If not, what is the basis for their satisfaction?

**<<Andrew Waugh: Can’t answer most of your questions, but one I can. Copyright in photographic images was (and is) different to other forms of copyright. Photographs taken before 1955 are now out of copyright. Copyright for images taken by non-staff photographers after 1955 would depend on the contract or agreement used by Fairfax ... Which is the record? \*If\* the original negatives are safe, why should anyone care about the fate of the access copies (i.e. the photographic prints)? If the digitised copies are surrogates of the negatives, which copy should we care about, and do we need to keep three versions?...It’s long been accepted that some things have so much cultural value that their export from Australia is subject to ministerial control. Why wasn’t this collection subject to this question? Was it, and the assumption was that it would come back? Or wasn’t it, perhaps because they were records and not real objects? Note that the Mitchell Library got the Fairfax archive. It’s not clear if this includes the negatives ... >>**

We can distinguish, I think, between the Company Archives of Fairfax Media and its predecessors and the News Archive comprising the resources that were used in producing the publications. The News Archive would include a Photographic Archive, comprising many images – some of which would actually appear on the pages of a newspaper when taken, some would appear later as “archival” or stock photos, and some might never be published. Newspapers also used to have Libraries (printed reference volumes, government publications, and clippings files from their own and other newspapers) that journalists could use when fact checking and researching their reportage. (Don’t know how much of that goes on these days; they probably take their cue from Greg Hunt and rely more on Google & Wikipedia and much of what we read now is just re-booted from service providers). The true Media Archive would be archival copies of the newspapers themselves, possibly for one of each for each of the daily editions, and master tapes of broadcasts. Of course, the News Archive for broadcasting would be multi-media. The “[Fairfax Media Archive](#)” is described on the Mitchell Library site in terms that do not tick all of these boxes:

The State Library of New South Wales has recently acquired what must certainly be the most significant and comprehensive media company archive in Australia. The Fairfax Media Limited’s company archive consists of over 2000 boxes of company records, ranging in date from the 1830s until 1991...Through this enormous archive we obtain an incredible and rare





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

insight into the boardrooms, offices and press rooms of this iconic company. This is a rich collection full of events, drama, and intrigue, with characters from the world of finance, politics and media empires. Over the coming months we will bring you highlights and stories from the collection as we work our way through it.

This seems to include the business records of the corporation (the Company Archives). There is nothing to suggest it includes what I have called the News Archive or the library resources. I doubt that archival copies of newspapers and broadcasts were included, much less the News Archive that supported broadcasting activities. If this is so, I think calling it the “Fairfax Media Archive” is a bit misleading. I’m not sure I have used the correct terminology, but the conceptual distinctions are clear enough – certainly clear enough to distinguish between the Fairfax Company Archives and the Fairfax Media Archive, but if the negatives are included the name would be more justifiable.

**PS.** I know something about this because my late mum used to work in the “library” at the Packer Press at Park & Elizabeth.

### **2017, July 5: ASA response to the changes at the State Records Office WA**

<<**Julia Mant:** The WA Government has announced that the State Records Office (SRO) would become part of the State Library of Western Australia (SLWA) with effect from 1 July 2017. As a directorate within the State Library structure, the SRO will...continue to support the State Records Commission and function in accordance with the State Records Act 2000. The Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) has protested the Machinery of Government (MOG) changes made by the McGowan Government, which have set aside recommendations of the Royal Commission into WA Inc. and Commission on Government on the operation of an independent archives authority. Please read the ASA’s press release to see the full text>>

The press release states, inter alia, that

The ASA will conduct a campaign to have the decision reversed and the independence of the State Records Office of WA maintained.

What is the ASA’s on-going position regarding NT and Tasmania?



If the argument for independence and separation is support for accountability, what is the objection to giving the Library management of the “collection” and delivery of user services and maintaining SRO’s r/keeping operations separately as an independent body w/o custodial responsibilities (as distinct from maintaining the status quo)? For that matter, what is the argument against a library exercising the r/keeping function? If an archives with “collection” responsibilities can manage both roles, why not a library?

Shades of the GLAM debate? I’m not arguing for or against the model of an archives authority w/o custodial responsibilities; nor am I saying that defence of the custodial role is hopeless. But I read the press release as saying things should stay as they are for purely non-



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

GLAM reasons without any argument in favour of the continuing conjunction of heritage and r/keeping functions. Whatever happens in Perth, we can't always rely on politicians being too stupid to ask the right questions. One day we may have to have an answer in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide (again), and Canberra.

**2017, July 6:**

Can someone point me to where this announcement can be found? I couldn't find a news source on Google and the [MOG website](#) has nothing about it that I could find.

There is a page on the [SRO site](#) offering advice and assistance to affected agencies but nothing that I could see suggesting that SRO itself is one of them. They seem to be doing this under the slogan "Public Sector Renewal".

**<<Mark Brogan: There is no discussion in WA about optimal models for the delivery of archival services. In that sense, if your post is directed at exploring hybrid delivery models and their effectiveness, don't expect the merger of SRO (WA) with LISWA to illuminate the argument in any way. There has been no proper review of existing machinery of government arrangements. Bog standard public policy prescription, namely, that a functional review be undertaken as a precursor to such a change, has been ignored in this instance. On the basis of the evidence available, it appears that SRO (WA) was kept in the dark about the proposed changes. Similarly, the new Labor Government did not go to the election with emasculation of SRO (WA) in its election platform.**

**The Government's intent is to reduce expenditure on library and archival services. We know that savings will likely include the loss of the current offices and reading room, possible non-replacement of the Director's position and further staff reductions (reference and other services will be supplied with some library personnel). So let's not guild the lily with lofty discussion of alternative delivery models and performance/efficiency improvements that might eventuate. That is not where this is coming from - although it should be expected that some retrospective justification of this kind will be offered.**

**Whether SRO (WA) should be an independent office and not subordinated to LISWA was a question investigated by the Commission on Government (COG) established after the WA Inc. Royal Commission. It concluded that it should be independent. I urge anyone interested in the question to read the [second COG report](#) ... Of course this is just one recommended reading on a question that deserves further research and is likely to be re-visited as you have suggested. Yes it is indeed likely that someday we will have to have an answer in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide (again), and Canberra. The apogee of the discourse on evidence, recordkeeping and accountable, ethical government was in the 1990s. Rightly or wrongly, well-resourced independent government archives reporting to the auditor general or parliament itself were hypothesized as important to integrity of government and accountability. The world has moved on since then.**

**The past decade has seen a retreat from these ideas, manifest in the situation which has emerged in WA. There is every likelihood that the situation will be repeated. The context is not just defined by a quest for savings. Information culture itself mostly prioritizes Internet information sources, at the expense of traditional memory stores. Governments of all persuasions, benefit from malleable rather than fixed archival memory, and are no friends of archives. Libraries are facing a similar existential crisis in their traditional form and librarians have to find something else to do or disappear.**

**So what is the good news? ASA Council has a budget line for advocacy in 2017/18 and will use this budget to promote what we consider to be the common good of a continuing, viable government records and archives sector. In SA we demonstrated that we can win. Whether we are successful or otherwise in WA, ventilating the issues publicly will bring benefits.>>**



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**2017, July 7:**

I don't wish to be a pain, I really don't, but I have to keep asking: what is it we are advocating? Is it the status quo (where our records authorities are almost all conjoined with management of heritage resources) or a pure accountability model (in which the accountability mechanism may be organisationally separate)? Is GLAM an essential component of what we want or a disposable extra? If they're after savings from a merger of offices, reading rooms, repositories, and reference services, why not give those things up as a trade off for independent accountability mechanisms. I accept, if you say so, that an opportunity to trade is not on offer in WA at the moment but if we are going to re-live this farce in a world that has moved on since the 1990s shouldn't we have a clear idea of what we are going to advocate in that changed environment? Perhaps it was too easily accepted back then that the 1990s model for delivery of archival services was the right place to locate r/keeping accountability responsibilities. If the world has moved on, maybe it's time we did also. Note: WA did, in fact, separate the accountability role in two – a kind of purchaser (Commission) and provider (SRO) split; it is a small step to further divide the SRO into a r/keeping provider and an archival heritage arm.

Successful advocacy requires two things above all: focus and persistence. Focus involves having a clear view of what it is we're fighting for and then sticking to it through hell and high water (without foregoing devious tactical flexibility when called for). If GLAM is an essential part of what we are fighting for, so be it. If it is a disposable extra, that's OK too. But if we want our advocacy to succeed, now and in the future, we have to be clear about what our goals are. Despite the questions posed in the foregoing paragraph, I hold (as indicated in previous postings) that the conjunction of r/keeping and the management of archival heritage is essential. You seem to be suggesting that the defence of SRO(WA)'s independence at this time should be based purely on the accountability argument. I think that is a different argument to keeping SRO(WA) independent in its present form. You say there is no need to consider this because the WA Govt is uninterested in discussing alternative models and that might well justify the tactics you propose. I'm in no position to dispute that judgement. But I think it a poor reason for not biting the bullet and deciding for now and for the future where we stand on the strategic question and, if we believe that the GLAM+r/keeping model is what we want, being forearmed with arguments in support.

**PS.** All this suggests I believe there are two distinct and un-related roles. Adrian has suggested the possibility of a unity rather than a conjunction of r/keeping and archival heritage. I don't dispute that, of course, but I haven't yet heard the argument convincingly put that this necessarily involves making the archives organisationally responsible for r/keeping accountability.

**2020, July 20:**

<<Mark Brogan: A [Statement of Position](#) has been produced by ASA Inc. on the merger. This is to be presented to the Director General, Culture and the Arts, Duncan Ord, AO, today. Thursday, 20 July...Having considered all of the available information, it is my conclusion that the current WA Government approach involves serious questioning of the requirement for a whole of government recordkeeping function and related agency. More information will become available after the meeting today, when the Society's President, Julia Mant, will present our position to D/G Duncan Ord... At its AGM on Thursday, 20 July, ASA (WA) Branch voted to embark on a campaign of continuing action in support of the positions described in the paper...>>

**2017, December 10: [Destruction of SMH archives](#)**

<<Joanna Sassoon: Photographs from the Sydney Morning Herald archives [up for auction](#) ...>>



### **2017, December 12:**

We've been here before. My understanding is that what went overseas was prints to be digitised and that the negatives remained here. These on auction appear to be off-prints from the digitisation. None of this is clear and my recollection may be faulty. The really interesting questions (to my mind) are –

- What is the fate of the negatives?
- On what terms will the digitised prints be made generally available (if at all)?

Does anyone know? How weird is it that selected prints from an archive are being auctioned in an art house (of all places)?

**<<Andrew Waugh: The glass plate negs (at least) are at the NLA. Copies of images can also be obtained from Fairfax. I'm not sure of the licensing arrangement>>**

Wouldn't it be funny if some of the images being auctioned were already available via Fairfax or NLA?

### **2017, December 13:**

**<<Antonina Lewis: They are studio prints from the original archive holdings, not post digitisation prints.**

**Catalogue info is pretty clear on that (identifying provenance & chain of custody is core business for auction houses). Eg; from the first lot in Mossgreen online catalogue listing:**

**JEFF CARTER (1928-2010)**

**(Nutcracker), 1968**

**silver gelatin photograph**

**dated, inscribed and stamped verso: 28 Aug 1968 / Waldron has been cracking nuts with a hammer since 1907. He has opened 80 tons in 50 years, can do 25 lbs. daily.**

**bears artist's studio stamp verso**

**10 x 8 cm>>**

**<<Joanna Sassoon: Thank you for clarifying this Antonina. It is not a happy story and is a fine example of the lack of respect for photographs as archives.>>**

### **2018, March 5: Two items**

Forgive me if these items have already been noticed on this list. I am catching up with things and I may have missed them being posted.

**ABC Sound & Reference Libraries ...**

**... closed in Adelaide, Hobart, and Perth with loss of 10 specialist librarians**

**NAA Cuts ...**

**... loss of 40 jobs over two years.**

### **2018, May 29: ASA Submission ... Canberra's National Institutions**

**ASA Submission to Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories' Inquiry into Canberra's National Institutions:**

**<<Katie Bird: <https://www.archivists.org.au/news/inquiry-into-national-institutions>**

**The Australian Society of Archivists calls on the Australian Government to quarantine Australia's national cultural institutions from the efficiency dividend measures, including the National Archives of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archives ... The impact of efficiency dividends on our national cultural institutions was a key focus of the ASA's Submission ... now available from the inquiry website.**

**... The challenge for our national institutions should be how they can create, protect and make accessible Australia's collective memory in the face of major digital and**





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**technological change and development, rather than simply doing more with less. We call on the Australian Government to adequately fund our key archival institutions to ensure:**

- **born-digital records are captured, managed and made accessible over time,**
- **archival audio and video analogue formats are migrated for access and preservation before 2025,**
- **sustainable digital archives and repositories are built, funded and supported thereby providing Australian citizens with continued access to key cultural and historical resources,**
- **and national institutions are able to employ professionally trained and specialist staff with relevant skills for the 21st century.>>**

### **2018, June 1:**

Having signed the petition to save SROWA, I now get Change.Org notifications. The latest reports on ASA's release about funding:

**29 May 2018** — ... SROWA will be operating with \$918,000 less than in 2016-17, representing a 30.7% reduction in real funding over three years...Not only is the WA Government declining to re-invest in a service that is essential to the proper and accountable operation of government, but it is actively working to reduce its resources and hence its effectiveness...due to changed financial circumstances arising largely from reductions in Government revenues from mining and the GST. But is the burden of changed financial circumstances being shared equally? In the same portfolio...over the same three year period:

- \*Public Library Services [increase] from \$14.275 million in 2016-17 to an estimated \$14.54 million in 2018-19
- \*Library Literacy and Community Engagement [increase] from \$9.8 million in 2016-17 to an estimated \$10 million in 2018-19
- \*Museum Services to the Regions [increase] from \$5.656 million in 2016-17 to \$6.06 million in 2018-19

...The WA Branch of ASA Inc. is providing public briefings on the State Library 'administrative change', funding and operation of the state archives and information management as part of its lobbying efforts.

Unfortunately, I won't be making the briefing, but I would like to know exactly how the funding cuts issue and the Library/Archives merger issue are related. In my time, I've seen many protests over cuts and neglect of archives come and go. The institutions themselves, of course, have to fight the bureaucratic struggle endlessly. Our community has to calculate how best to assist (or avoid impeding) them but we need to make our own decisions on what to do and what position(s) to adopt.

- In the past, some have felt that it is invidious for us to argue for the relative merit of archives vs galleries, museums, and libraries. The SROWA release suggests a different approach arguing the relative importance of archives not just their intrinsic importance. I support this approach even if it violates the we're-all-in-this-together (GLAM) rhetoric, which is the flavour of the [Submission on National Institutions](#). Yes, the things we care about are mixed up in GLAM but the things we care about suffer if we aren't also clear about the differences with GLM and why archives matter more (even when our affairs are mixed up with theirs).
- On a larger front: are archives more important than defence? Or, in terms of State-based funding, more important than roads, health & welfare, or education? I've actually had that question put to me (more than once). These comparisons can be dismissed out of hand. They compare apples and oranges. Spending on archives is not a big ticket item and no basis for comparison exists. We're in there squabbling with other small fry for scraps from the table. I think at that level we do need to clarify our ideas about our relative importance outside GLAM. Are we brave enough to rate



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

ourselves in importance compared to (say) sport, legal aid, environment protection, etc.? And to defend that rating?

- I understand why there is an appeal to “accountable government” because that enjoins a certain kind of support for our cause (one that distinguishes us from GLAM) but it is a false emphasis and possibly counter-productive. Our mission is also cultural (part of GLAM). I would want to argue that archives are evidence of human activity on a par with museums and that libraries and galleries come second (that’s the philistine in me) even at the cost of buying a glamorous fight. Moreover, I would say that, more so than museums, our value lies in the present as well as the past (hence the nexus between accountability and culture).
- The Submission on National Institutions tries another gambit: digital r/keeping. Paradoxically, compared with the SROWA Submission, the emphasis here is on digital heritage rather than accountability. Is that really a winner? If it were me, I’d be talking about the woeful mess the IT industry is making of managing legacy data.
- Ours is, therefore, a complex message to craft but not beyond the ability of potential stakeholders to understand. At least, I saw it that way (to some extent) in NZ when I was there – but perhaps Kiwis are smarter than Aussies. Not the least of the complexities lie in stakeholder management. Some of our stakeholders are the same as GLM’s and some are not. Crafting a message that they can all understand and buy into isn’t easy. Of course, if the glamorous are prepared to support us without our having to have a fight, so much the better.
- As always, success in advocacy depends on two things: consistency and persistence. There is a tendency for archivists to keep on changing their message. There is also a tendency to give up when a battle is lost and not to go on fighting the war (not suggesting there’s evidence of that here). PS. The argument I have woven here is also the case against the SROWA merger (a nexus!).

As ever, I wish this campaign (these campaigns) well.

### **2018, June 2:**

**<<Mark Brogan: ...the funding of SROWA is very much an issue related to the amalgamation proposal. Some of the proposals for a ‘merged’ service delivery model include co-location and resource sharing, in areas such as reference. The WA State Government expects to achieve savings (aka an ‘efficiency dividend’) from resource sharing and contrary to its public claim that the merger is ‘purely administrative’, it has a service rationalization vision which will see some State Library staff performing work formerly done by SROWA staff...In as much as the [change.org](#) posting framed cuts within the general landscape of penury that characterizes WA Government finances in the wake of the collapse of commodity prices, I concede that this additional back story ought to have been told...some of the evidence found in the WA Government’s red tape enquiry and elsewhere, also suggests that the WA Government rejects the need for an agency like SROWA altogether, preferring instead a small ‘heritage collection’ with no legislatively mandated WoG oversight of government recordkeeping of the kind envisaged by the State Records Act 2000.**

**Taking your point that arguments that involve appeals to accountability and archives as essential to the integrity of government, do not always work in our favour, I agree that care needs to be exercised in crafting the message and that some of our esoteric proofs or relevance may be counter-productive...In a post truth world, where the electorate is tolerant of lying politicians and routinely confuses belief with knowledge, it is hard to make the case for the relevance and importance of programs aimed at promoting, reliable accessible memory of government. But try we must. The official report of the red tape enquiry showed that we were effective in blunting the**



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

attack on the State Records Act 2000 contained in the enquiry briefing paper. I remind readers of this thread, that representations made to the WA Government by ASA Inc. (WA) were broadly based and suggested many practical justifications for why it should believe in, and support SROWA.>>

### **2018, June 27: Fairfax Photographic Archive**

This topic has come to the fore from time to time on this list. The last news of which I am aware was [a year ago](#). That story was spun as good news that an American collector had “rescued” the archive following the collapse of the 2013 deal Fairfax made with “Little Rock entrepreneur and conman John Rogers”. The story couldn’t disguise the fact that what was happening was that the archive was being broken up and sold off piece-meal and, moreover, that “[i]t seems a large portion remain missing.” Does anyone have more recent (and/or more accurate) information?

### **2018, July 16: NAA spends up big**

In the Weekend Oz there was [a story](#) about NAA’s spending (nearly \$1m in one year!) in defending disputed access cases (including Jenny Hocking’s fight to gain access to the Kerr Papers) :

The National Archives, which has recently lost staff due to budget cuts, has spent nearly \$1 million fighting the release of information including John Kerr’s letters to Buckingham Palace and documents on Australian spying in East Timor. The agency released the figures this week in response to a question on notice from Centre Alliance senator Rex Patrick, who is set to push for changes to freedom-of-information laws via a private member’s bill in the next sittings of parliament. The agency said it had spent \$926,474.89 from the 2015-16 - financial year until May 31 this year fighting the release of records and information...Archives chief David Fricker said recently government cuts to the ~~11ealized1111at~~ would leave it less able to give access to records. “There’s been a decline in our capacity to provide access to records,” Mr Fricker told Senate estimates in May. “There’s also been a decline in our capacity to transfer records. So there has been a decline in our capacity to carry out our preservation activities.” The agency has let go of a number of staff since budget cuts and plans to shed even more staff this financial year. “We are on a steady path of downsizing the ~~11ealized1111at~~ in terms of our full-time equivalents employed at the archives,” Mr Fricker said.

Perhaps it’s as well that NAA can’t transfer and evaluate more records for access. It may mean they spend less \$\$\$ on defending their decisions in future.



On a more serious note (not that I think \$1m out of NAA’s budget is a joke), it raises again the question of distributed archives – not distribution of “custody” (a red herring, really) but obliteration of the archival boundary. As Bearman once said, “*custody is a good idea, someone should do it.*” While involved in drafting legislation in the ‘70s, ‘80s, ‘90s, and ‘00s, I became thoroughly convinced that the model in my brief was dumb. The model being

- **minimal “interference”** by archives before transfer and
- nearly **total responsibility** afterwards.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

The respective roles of the archives and agencies were **defined by the whereabouts of the records.**

**Stupid!!!! Stupid!!!! Stupid!!!!**

We gave archives some role in r/keeping pre-transfer (e.g. disposal regulation, standards, etc.) and agencies some residual responsibilities post-transfer (far too few) but the correct model would be function-based: **identify and assign responsibilities** between archives and agencies functionally responsible for the activities records deal with **irrespective of age or location**. Archives would take over full responsibility only for orphans (viz. records for which no current agency could be found to take responsibility). They did something like it in the ACT, not necessarily for the right reasons (*The last temptation is the greatest treason, to do the right thing for the wrong reason*). On that model, \$1m defending access decisions would come out of agency budgets, not the archives because decisions on access restriction/release would certainly be made by the responsible agency, not the archives.

The most fatuous objection to the distributed model was that with functional diaspora over time it would become increasingly difficult to assign distributed responsibility. Wrong again, dummy. Say after me: custody isn't the issue. You don't have to move the records to where the responsibility lies. You have to move responsibility to where the records are.

**PS.** The same edition of the *Oz* carried a story about the Government's response to the loss of control over Cabinet papers that ended up with the ABC. Conclusion: they are going to beef up security of Cabinet papers by introducing a more rigorous regime for controlling the whereabouts of filing cabinets! Perhaps someone doesn't understand the distinction between Cabinet and cabinet.

<<**Andrew Waugh: You read the Weekend Oz? IMVHO the problem with the distributed custody model is simply that preservation of records after administrative use has ceased is simply not a agency priority \*and will never be\*. The priority when allocating budgets in agencies is: 1) the specific business of the agencies (collecting tax, running the military, hosting cocktail parties in foreign embassies); and then 2) running the business of delivering 1) (e.g. finance, hr, buildings). Preserving and making available records that no longer support 1) or 2) is normally not even on the spending radar...The advantage of an archive is that keeping old records \*is\* one of their core functions. I agree with you, though, that it's about responsibilities. In this case the cost of legal action to defend closures should be the responsibility of the agency that made the decision to keep the records closed. If the decision is made by the archive, the archive pays. If the decision is made by the agency, they pay.>>**

I'm sorry, Andrew, you're still missing the point.

1. Distribution of responsibility **isn't about records surviving in agencies**. It's not about where they are. That's an idea that's still trapped inside custodial thinking. The distributed model is agnostic about that. They might be in an agency, in a centralised store, in a network of stores, in the cloud, on Mars, in an archives repository even. It just doesn't matter. Once agencies have to pay for it and take responsibility they will make a choice on what best suits them (so long as they meet their obligations).
2. Distribution of responsibility **isn't about agencies deciding whether or not to prioritise archival obligations** either. Agencies don't just allocate budgets to (1) and (2). They also have to spend money on meeting public sector obligations that all agencies have in addition to their operational functions whether they like it or not (FOIA, privacy, OH&S, harassment, diversity, security, etc., etc., etc.). The distributed model simply makes archiving one of those obligations.

You may say that archiving will suffer because it is an obligation they won't take as seriously as the others. That's a matter of internal discipline within the public sector. How does government make it so? Instead of applying its budget to transferring records and clearing





them, it would be the special responsibility of the archives authority to expend its resources on finding ways to facilitate and on ensuring that agencies did in fact discharge their archiving responsibilities (time for a I – steering, not rowing). All public sector obligations struggle when up against operational priorities. The distributed model doesn't answer how to ensure that archiving is done well once it becomes a public sector obligation instead of the sole responsibility of the archives authority. It doesn't have to, since that is part of a larger question::viz. how to ensure agencies discharge their public sector responsibilities (all of them, not just archiving). It is a question which must be answered seriatim not singly. The archival part of the question that interests us is whether a custodial approach is more or less likely to achieve a better outcome. We have it from no less an authority than David Fricker, testifying before Senate Estimates, that maybe it don't. I can't believe we're still debating Archival Methods 101.

**P.S.** Richard Cox once asked “why should agencies care about their archives if we take them away and give them no say in how they're managed? Good question.

**2018, October 15:** [For things to remain the same ...](#)

*For things to remain the same, everything must change (Lampedusa).*

I've had solar panels now for about 2 years and next week I become the proud owner of a PowerWall Solar Battery. So I'm fascinated by this [article](#) in the SMH:

... Australia has been installing around 100 megawatts of new solar power every month in 2018 and there are predictions that the country could become the first country in the world where the grid cannot handle the excess level of distributed electricity generated. That would mean the power generated would be wasted as it could not be transported to where it could be used ... “It's feast or famine with renewables ...,” EnergyAustralia director Mark Collette told Fairfax Media ... We'll hit a point where there is no point in putting any more solar power into the system without something changing...” ...AEMO chief Audrey Zibelman said an average six rooftop solar panels are installed in Australia every minute, [adding the equivalent of a new coal-fired power station every year](#). According to Green Energy Markets data, in July, rooftop and large-scale solar accounted for around 4 per cent of the country's total electricity generation ...

Renewable energy campaigner Simon Holmes á Court said the energy market operator has forecast solar to grow right through to 2040. “This idea of a peak all hinges on the pretext of if we do nothing, but we're not doing nothing,” Mr Holmes á Court told Fairfax Media. “I don't see us sitting still, yes, there is a lot of work to do in the grid but we're going to do it.” ...



The art of being sometimes audacious and sometimes very prudent is the secret of success.

~ Napoleon Bonaparte



Unity of command is essential to the economy of time. Warfare in the field was like a siege: by directing all one's force to a single point a breach might be made, and the equilibrium of opposition destroyed.

Apart from the satisfaction I derive from being part of this problem and not part of the solution, it illustrates one of Napoleon Bonaparte's maxims for success on the battlefield (but transferable to any organized human activity): viz. flexibility of tactics in pursuit of a clearly articulated goal. The others include force concentration, calculated risk (if war were nothing but the avoidance of risk, glory would become the prey of mediocre minds), and focused leadership (one bad general is better than two good ones). What has all this to do with r/keeping? I see it as an almost perfect metaphor for dealing with change in any arena.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Without pre-judging any of these issues in our world, here is a list of just a few of the roles and responsibilities issues that come up from time to time where the “problem” we face may be the assumptions we make when dealing with them:

- When enduring funding cuts, what role(s) should we promote – old ones “on the pretext [that] we do nothing [new]” or ones we weren’t assigned in the first place, e.g. publication via digitization.
- Should we assume that the revered stand-alone archives is the model for the future?
- Should we go on defending criminalization of poor r/keeping in the public sector?
- Is the fusion of our r/keeping accountability role and our heritage role a status quo we should still be defending?
- Are “traditional archives” redundant? Should archiving be part of a business process? IT is thinking about this; clumsily, to be sure, but they’re thinking about it (basic idea: continuum vs life-cycle).
- If so, what happens to archiving integrated into business processes when the business process (or enterprise) folds? Is that what we should be thinking about?

### **2018, November 26: Follow the money**

[Posted to the NZ List](#) – analysis of the budgetary consequences of amalgamation.

### **2019, March 9: Fairfax Photographs**

<<**Andrew Waugh: Another chapter in the ongoing story. The Canberra Museum and Gallery have purchased the original prints relating to Canberra. The cost for the 3,500 images was \$20,000,,,>>**

<<**Joanna Sassoon: Two things could be done by CMAG, the provenance could be preserved and the backs digitised ...>>**



**SMH Library 1931**



**Hunter Street: Photo Sales**

I’m puzzled every time this story comes up. As a lad, I was a user of these images when Fairfax ran a “Photo Sales” Department in Hunter St, Sydney (later moved to Broadway). They had recent prints in huge albums that you could rifle through. You could select an image and order it to be made to your specification as to size and in glossy or matt finish. Obviously, your order was filled by them going to the negatives and running it off. It took a few days. The organisation of the images on display was poor but each image bore an identity code that (I assume) controlled the archive. My memory is that what was mounted in albums was only portion of what was available for sale and that you could also select from negative images for excess material not mounted in albums. I doubt that these were original negatives but rather that they were use copies run off as duplicate negatives for ease of handling. But that was only the public-facing sales operation. Yes, Joanna, the sales prints were captioned in the albums but not (from memory) on the backs because they were mounted. I think the



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

negatives were inscribed in white along the bottom (but I may be remembering incorrectly). I have a clear recollection, however, that they were all identified somehow.

When a print image was delivered to order and paid for there was nothing inscribed on it but the details were on the invoice/receipt. The back was rubber stamped with the Fairfax claim to ownership and copyright. I don't know how far back the sales albums + sales negatives went but my memory was that you could search back quite a few years. Don't know what arrangements were in place (if any) for finding even older images not on view in Photo Sales. I imagine the prints that have fetched up in California were kept behind the sales office or elsewhere in the organisation for reference purposes by Fairfax staff and re-generated when needed from master negatives using the same reference codes. Is it possible there was some kind of registration and/or indexing system sitting behind all this? There must have been to keep the numbering system in place.

So, what are these "photographs" that have undergone this saga?

- Have both prints and master negatives survived? How many duplicates, in one form or other, exist pre-digitisation?
- Has it all now been digitised? If not, will it ever?
- Are the bits being sold off piece-meal duplicates made for sale leaving the archive intact or plundered portions of whatever it is that now remains?
- If the latter, how ethical is it for a "collection" to abet the plunder and dismemberment? Even if oblivion is the alternative (the Elgin defence)..
- If there were control records originally, have these survived? How much description of each image can now be recovered?

There is no doubt in my mind that this is (was?) a major cultural artefact that should never have been allowed to leave the country if that could have been prevented. When are steps going to be taken to get it back? Instead of congratulating the Gallery, perhaps Gordon Ramsay should hang his head in shame for being the last in a long line of Arts Ministers to do nothing about it. In the meantime, does anyone have information on what "it" is that we are actually talking about?

### **2019, March 10:**

<<**Joanna Sassoon**: ... This is a good example of the complexity of photographic archives of picture agencies and explains how their histories are embedded in the items they contain ... as Chris says understanding which 'it' you have, returns you to the archival questions about production, function and circulation. These are questions that go well beyond the image content, but in the absence of control documentation, they can be asked of, and occasionally be answered by looking at the prints themselves including their backs ... In one sense the horse has bolted, but the finger should now be pointed at those who support the plundering of this archive rather than its return in toto – and this includes institutions purchasing bits and pieces and those public officials such as Ambassadors and Ministers, who should be acting in the national interest ...>>

### **2019, March 11:**

<<**Andrew Waugh**: The official **Fairfax position in 2015** ... answers some of the questions raised by Joanna ... Clearly, despite the wishful legal thinking in the article, Fairfax wasn't able to reclaim the Sydney photographic prints sent to the US. Note that there is little mention of any control records in the article. It does infer that there were metadata on the back of the prints. Hopefully this was duplicated somewhere and tied to the negatives, otherwise the negs would be useless. In Bill Bryson's autobiography (The life and times of the Thunderbolt kid) he mentions the fate of the photographic archive of 'The Des Moines Register', a major regional US newspaper that both his parents worked for. It was pulped to reclaim the silver content.>>





## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

### 2019, May 15: Funding for Archives?

According to [Luke Buckmaster](#) the Coalition Arts Policy is so thin as to be transparent and [Labor's Policy](#) is flawed because it doesn't deal adequately with local content. I'm assuming (alas) that if a politician says anything about archives it's going to be in an Arts Policy (ugh!). Looking at Labor's the only thing I could see that is remotely relevant is a section on Collecting Institutions (ugh!!!!).

Labor values Australia's national collecting institutions and the role they play in protecting and celebrating Australian stories. Australia's collections are world class and share their skills and resources to help each other and other institutions in the region. Labor will continue to support our collecting institutions so that Australia's cultural material is made available, maintained and shared wherever possible. Labor also supports programs and policies that promote best practice for collecting cultural material and ensuring ethical collecting in Australia continues, especially in regard to First Nations' cultural material. Labor will also commit \$20 million to strengthen Bundanon as a collecting institution by building a new gallery to showcase more art. The work of our creatives needs to be communicated to fellow Australians and to the world.

Nothing I could see about reversing cuts to the institutions, much less anything about funding the archival enterprise outside of them. And, of course, nothing about r/keeping more broadly. Perhaps if we turned recordkeeping into a "creative" endeavour (recasting the record according to a script, perhaps, or to celebrate a "vision") it would attract more attention from our polies.

Interestingly, the Labor Policy has a section on Health Innovation (it's about art therapy) which I would have put in my Health Policy if I had one, so maybe there's something about r/keeping where you wouldn't expect to find it. Did anyone discover anything in another policy (from either side)? Justice and Law? Government Administration? Privacy and Access? Come to think about it, those are the places where I would expect to find it. I've already voted, so my interest is purely academic.

### 2019, May 17: You're voting for who?



Or is it whom? Disenchanted, like many, with the political process, I've been trawling the minor parties – mainly to weed out the nutters (there's a lot of them). And I've found one I rather like. I don't agree with everything the [Pirate Party](#) advocates but overall it aligns better with my views than any of the others. I won't be specific about what I do and don't agree with so as not to inflame the list over extraneous matters, but there are three items with a r/keeping flavour that bear upon what we do :

#### **Privacy - The snooper's honeypot**

Metadata retention laws force ISPs to collect a vast database of amounts of detail on the private lives of individuals to be perused by the state without any judicial oversight. This is a honeypot not just for officials, but for hackers and criminals. Mass surveillance does information on their customers. This includes records of all emails sent and received, websites visited, locational information from phones, and much more. Data is stored for two years, allowing immense not prevent terrorism or aid in combating it. But it does create a terrible precedent for state intrusion into every corner of private life and civil society. EU courts have thrown out similar schemes due to their gross incompatibility with basic rights;





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

that this hasn't happened here is testimony to the inadequacy of Australian privacy laws ... Australia needs a comprehensively higher standard of legal protection for privacy. Such a standard should include tougher legislative requirements on organisations which retain data, and improved options for individuals seeking to protect their personal privacy. Pirate Party Australia also proposes a new privacy tort to curb future adverse changes to the law and prevent misuse of private information.

### **Copyright - Create an Orphan Works Office**

- Create an Orphan Works Office with the power to declare whether a work has been abandoned by its creator ('orphaned').
- Provide that individuals, groups and corporations will be able to apply to the Orphan Works Office to have a work declared as orphaned.
- Require creators or rights holders to demonstrate that the work continues to be published in a manner accessible in Australia.
- Allow the Orphan Works Office to declare a work as being orphaned if it can be demonstrated that the work is no longer published in a manner accessible in Australia.
- Provide that a work enters the public domain if the Orphan Works Office declares it has been orphaned.
- Provide that the Administrative Appeals Tribunal will hear appeals relating to decisions of the Orphan Works Office
- Require the Orphan Works Office keep a public register of orphan works.

### **Culture and Media - Develop a network of facilities to support development of art and culture**

- .....
- Mandate that any DRM protected product for sale in Australia has an obligation to hand over keys or other mechanisms required to access it in its totality, after either termination of copyright or termination of sale.
    - o The disclosure will be to the National Archives until termination of copyright, and held in confidence until it enters the public domain.

I'm so much more comfortable with being part of a Culture and Media Policy instead of an Arts Policy.

**<<Michael Piggott: ... FYI, [GLAM Peak](#) tried to get some traction on the arts/culture type policies in time for the election, its [Advocacy booklet](#) identifying priority areas of the efficiency dividend, digital collections (of course), indigenous cultural competency, national research infrastructure, and copyright. Nothing about recordkeeping, and archives are lumped within 'cultural collections'.**

The Position Statement of March 2019 on copyright notes:

Status

We continue to advocate for:

- Laws that increase the usability of copyright material balanced with the rights of creators
- Copyright exceptions to override contracts
- Exceptions that permit the use of orphan works.

**GLAM Peak advocacy amplifies the work of the Australian Digital Alliance and the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee.>>**

### **2019, July 18: [Update on advocacy - SROWA](#)**

**<<Mark Brogan (July 18: On 13 June, 2019, Greens MLC Alison Xamon made a Statement to the WA Parliament on the 2019-20 budget allocation for the WoG records and archives function and the apparent disappearance of SROWA from budget papers as an allocation entity ... Further evidence that 'Culture and the Arts' can be a budgetary blackhole for the archives function.>>**

The incredible shrinking, disappearing records office –

"The State Records Office has been completely buried in this latest budget. It has disappeared as an independent entity from the 2013–14 state budget. The service provided by the State



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Records Office has gone from being “government record keeping and archival services” to “state information management and archival services”. In this budget, that service has entirely disappeared and has been subsumed into “corporate and asset and infrastructure support to the culture and arts portfolio and government”. The associated note says that it is due to difficulties calculating these measures, those being key performance and other performance indicators..

Some quite profound issues here for us. How far are these developments a manifestation of cruel fate at work and how far do they derive from confusion of mind and purpose on our part?

### **Update on Advocacy:**

What is it that we are advocating for? Is it clear even to ourselves? And if so, how do we make it clear to a public whose support is necessary if we are to prevail over Them (whoever they may be)? A public, I fear, more interested in tax cuts than anything much further beyond self-interest (at my age, I’m allowed to be cynical). Mark’s post links the importance of an “independent” service to recordkeeping integrity issues going back to WA Inc. How persuasive is this? When They slashed the health inspectors, the rats came back. As the SRO disappears, where is the evidence that corruption (WA style) is returning? If not, how can we convincingly argue that there is mischief afoot? Not disputing it, just asking how we prove it. How do we demonstrate that good governance depends on good r/keeping (that one is impossible without the other)? And how do we convince the public of this? How many of them remember WA Inc? Is an appeal to the conclusions of a Royal Commission from decades ago enough? How do we keep our issues green and urgent in the public consciousness? Where are the other good governance allies we enlist in our support?

### **Government record keeping and archival services:**

The word “and” is a conjunction of two different things. For the cognoscenti, archival services are not different, they are subsumed within recordkeeping. But we can’t expect the public or Them to understand this. Our case is weakened by the seemingly improbable conjunction of culture and governance – art and accountability. Either we need to-

- a) develop a better argument than I have ever heard in support of the proposition that an archives (and an “independent” archives at that) is the only (or, at any rate, the best) vehicle for recordkeeping within government, or
- b) refine our case by plumping for one and annihilating the other from our argument.

But the logic of (b) is accepting that the two functions can be exercised independently of each other – viz. that the r/keeping authority can be exercised independently of the archives authority. Do we like the sound of hat?

### **Government record keeping or state information management:**

The word “or” indicates alternatives. Like r/keeping and archives, we must be clear on the implications of distinguishing records and information or subsuming one within the other. It may not be likely that we can sustain a distinction for the public or for Them, but it is still relevant to ask if it makes a difference to us. Because an agency charged with responsibility for “state information management” would certainly have wider, less focused, responsibilities than one charged with responsibility for “government record keeping”. The State might legitimately feel the need for an agency with the larger remit, in which case we would have to decide whether we saw the r/keeping responsibility as one that should operate alongside or within such an agency. That decision would be a tactical as well as an intellectual one – always assuming our views would count in any material way.

### **Unable to calculate key performance and other indicators:**

Well! There’s the challenge for us and we should be grateful for having it so clearly expressed. Bear in mind though that there are other areas of deep public concern where shockingly vivid measures of social dysfunction are possible but They simply refuse to compile and



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

disclose them. I'm thinking aged care, building safety, income inequality, criminalisation of drugs, etc. And if measures do exist that disturb vested interests (or complacency) they are simply disputed (e.g. school funding, global warming). Leaving aside the challenge of getting others to care, how clear have we been in articulating the measure of good r/keeping? How measurable are the standards we are so proud of? How well do they serve as predictable tests of success or failure? How strictly have they been applied? Are they enforceable or "aspirational" (to recall ASA's worthless Appraisal Standard)? Are our standards of the kind that measure outcomes? Or, are they the other kind - the ones that prescribe setting up systems and processes that, if implemented, might improve matters but are audited only to see if they have been put in place, not whether they in fact result in anything worthwhile.

**2019, July 22:**

<<**Peter Crush: ...our profession serves many different record creators and advocacy for one type doesn't necessarily ring any bells with the others ... focussed advocacy requires substantial and persistent resources from those in the know (us)...>>**

Granted that we are a diverse lot, it follows that focussed advocacy must be tailored to each issue and we must be varied and nimble when re-fashioning our message(s) to meet each case. And we must just hope that we don't end up saying something in one cause that embarrasses us when it is recalled in another fight. Example: the Australian Conservation Foundation is scrambling to review its previous support for alternative energy to see if they've ever dismissed the threat wind farms pose to bird-life (to the delight of the Murdoch press).



That's not what I see as our major problem. I'm not so much fussed by what divides us; my questions are around what unites us. It's an old problem: how diverse can you become without sacrificing your identity. Eventually you lose identity or morph into something else. Too dangerous a topic (probably) for me to make parallels with Australian Multi-Culturalism and the place of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders within our society and likely to get me into hot water just for alluding to it. Vegemite and cricket remain of course, but who can doubt that our society is "different" to the 1950s when I was a lad. But that is "difference" that is actually change over time (evolution). That's not what Peter's talking about. Managing "difference" within the same time frame is a much more difficult thing – as the turmoil over identity politics and populism sheweth.

Look back to Western Roman Empire in its last days when its absorption of outsiders (which had been going on for centuries) reached a tipping point and Roman-ness itself began a long decline into extinction because the society became so diverse and the power relationships so unbalanced that the unifying element was lost. I have argued, from time to time, that r/keeping as we know it is doomed to go the way of Roman-ness. But (on the bright side), and because I believe mankind is a recordkeeping mammal, it will re-emerge (like Roman-ness) as something else when the need for documented evidence is sought by people who think they are discovering it for the first time. As dinosaurs evolved into birds, "we" will

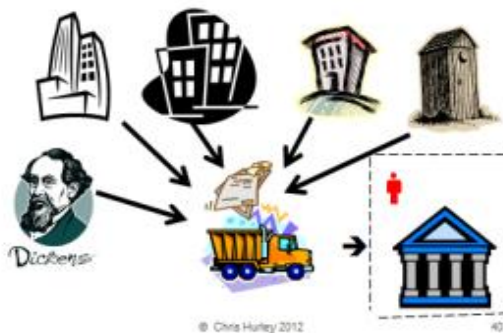


## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

become something else. Just as Roman-ness can today be seen as part of Western Civilisation (but not like anything that Tacitus or Cicero would have recognised).

What has this to do with us and the treatment of our differences now? Well, in order to postpone our extinction, I would like us to find an underlying purpose that binds diverse “records creators” into a single frame of mind, a unifying identity, a shared source for the varied and nimble advocacy. It’s what Joanna called, a few months ago, a way of thinking about documentary materials that differentiates us from others. This question lies at the boundary not in the pith of who we are. I don’t disagree that there is diversity under the r/keeping umbrella but in advocating myself for a broad view I have always sought out the boundaries that unify us while populating the areas within those boundaries with an understanding of what differentiates us. When arguing over many years, for example, that mss librarians are archivists, my argument has always been that this is because manuscripts are archives and not library collectables and should therefore be treated according to the way that archivists think. And to anticipate the facile quibble: If a librarian treats mss the way an archivist thinks, then that librarian, whether he/she realises it or not, is an archivist.

### What we do (custodial view)



### Description (classic view)

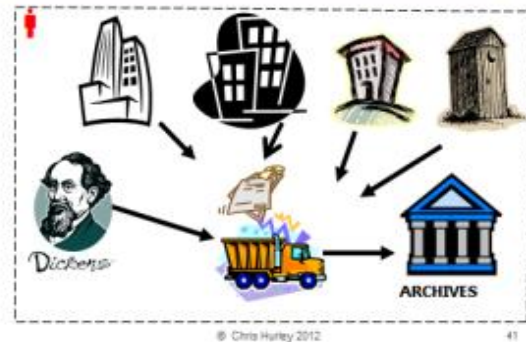
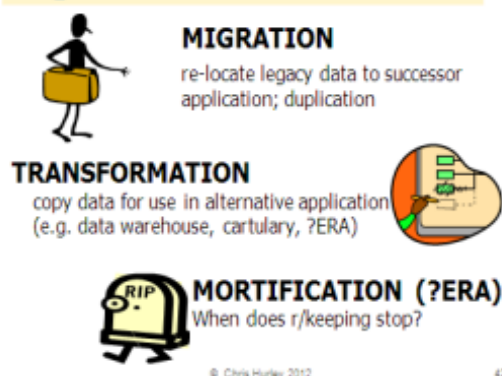


Figure Twenty Two

Does this matter? Many of the Listers think not. Refer back to the heat generated over the term “collection” when discussing toxic assets. My view, which doesn’t in any way dispute Peter’s point about how to encompass “different” record creators in an advocacy strategy, is that each different perspective ought to rest on some more fundamental foundation that shapes and directs our efforts. We have the same problem as the ACF – how to unite around the principle of supporting renewable energy without becoming accomplices in the slaughter of the eagles.

### Migration / Transformation



### What we do (re-imagined)

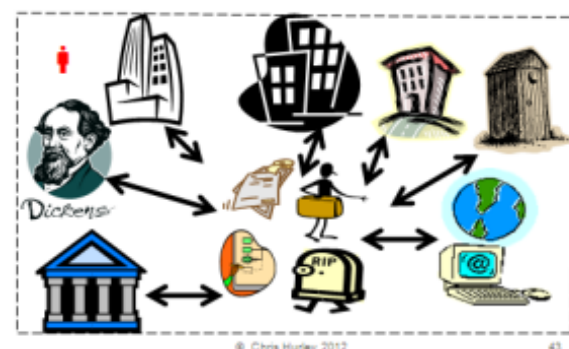


Figure Twenty Three

<<Mark Brogan: ... If we have failed to protect and grow our important institutions, programs and collections, is this a problem with us? Is it a problem with the political,





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

social or economic context in which these programs operate? Or, perhaps, a combination of both?

Attribution of the responsibility to 'us' suggests some of the issues raised by Chris including the wisdom of continuing to flog recordkeeping and issues to do with clarity and focus in what we are about. In the case of the former, thoughtful reflection suggests that the 1990s were something of a purple patch for the idea of recordkeeping. As a program justification, however, the idea has been in decline ever since. There are better levers. But we don't throw out the baby with the bath water.

Do we exaggerate the scale and significance of confusion of purpose and clarity? While its always great to have clarity and focus, I don't see difference of emphasis arising from contextual as a problem. Diversity of perspective can be vital to problem solving, renewal and demonstrating relevance. I look at the stuff the GLAM people are doing and take heart. Importantly, there are also shared understandings across context. Taking the mission aspect of things, people who do archival work share a mission to preserve and make accessible recorded memory found in the information entities with which they work. Memory that should be kept for reasons of continuing value. Whilst there are differences in emphasis, there is, nonetheless, a robust understanding of commonality of purpose.

For me, education, commitment and communication are the areas in which we need to make improvements. These are also the parts of us we can control and re-shape to improve effectiveness. With education, if the business these days is more about data, I can't see any point in producing anyone from a tertiary course without usable skills in the dominant programming language of the day (Python), xml and SQL. If we are serious about authenticity, then we would throw in digital forensics as well. These things are hard and that's where commitment comes in. Commitment also shapes advocacy fundamentally. It moves advocacy from the writing of submissions, which are usually ignored, to coordinated actions that make a difference. When we protested the likely dissolution of State Records SA by staging a demonstration, the media paid attention and the politicians became interested. Protesting in this sense, was one component of a strategy to communicate our cause.

Looking at the political, social and economic context within which our institutions and programs operate, change is happening in ways that are challenging and that we need to recognize in strategy and tactics. These changes are part of a larger picture of change, that is impacting on other areas of government service provision in equally dramatic fashion. Small, lean government is the prevailing orthodoxy, with dramatically decreased emphasis on service delivery by government. Inevitably, governments are going to come knocking on the doors of our institutions looking for savings on a regular basis (efficiency dividends) if we present as easy targets. Considering also that government is becoming less accountable and more authoritarian, we need to reflect on what this means for our messaging and strategy.>>

**2019, July 24:**

**<<Diversity of perspective can be vital to problem solving>>**

Agree – this is our understanding of ourselves.

**<<renewal>>**

Agree – this too.

**<<and demonstrating relevance>>**

Not so sure – this is about communicating our understanding of things to others.

**<<I look at the stuff the GLAM people are doing and take heart>>**

The GLAM people have an easier job advocating their cause because what they are communicating is a message rooted in an understanding that they share with those with whom they are communication- the wider public, the community, the target of their advocacy already know what the GLAMorous are talking about. They don't have



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

to explain what libraries, galleries, and museums are, what they do, and why they are (thought to be) important. At worst, they have to convince sceptics who don't value GLAM – but they don't have to explain or dispel misconceptions. I think our threshold problem is that we do have to explain what it is that we are about before we can start communicating – and, if we want to promote r/keeping, dispel misconceptions for those who aren't focused on solving “our” problems or on “our” renewal and need to be convinced that they should be.

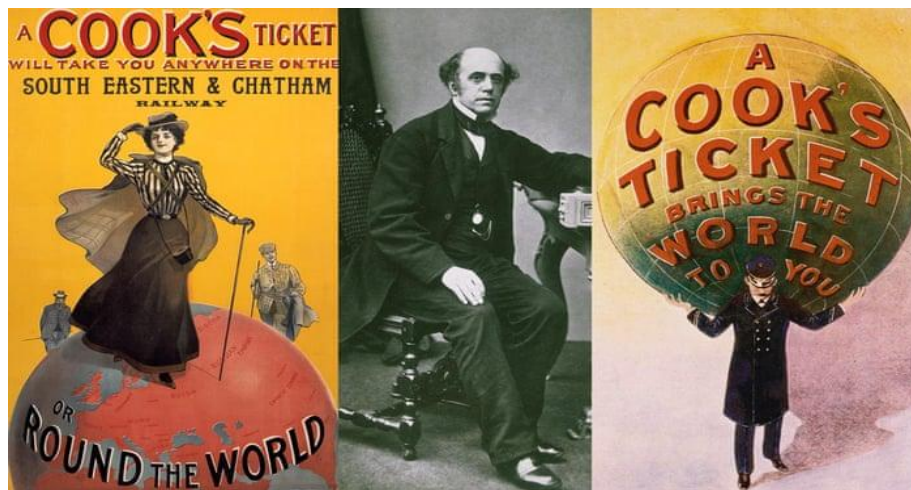
And it's worse than that because we have allowed ourselves to become the “A” in GLAM. We've acquiesced in the idea that we are collectors and that our importance, our purpose, our value add to society is aligned with the role of the cultural collections. Some of us even glory in that alignment and seem impervious to the danger. So, when it comes to communicating our message to others (not to having an internal debate amongst ourselves), we have to begin by explaining that well, yes, we are part of GLAM, but, well, we're sort of not only that. For that reason, our message is confused – just like I said. “*Explain to me again why a cultural collection should be responsible for government r/keeping?*” I think NAA, ArNZ, and a couple of the State programmes have had some fluctuating successes in bificturation – blending the two into a “memory” theme – but in-house archives tend to subordinate the archives to the r/keeping, still together maybe but the balance is not level. We seem to agree this is an important issue. Why isn't it more discussed?

<<**John Machin**: “*why isn't this discussed?*”

**I think because it is a Difficult Conversation that requires some engagement with realities that are uncomfortable for those who are most involved. Some of those most able to participate in these discussions, and arguably most in need of them being had, have self-perceived motivation to avoid them; and certainly to avoid having them in public.>>**

**2019, September 25: [Thomas Cook Archives](#)**

<<**Joanna Sassoon**: ... [Appeal](#) to preserve Thomas Cook archive as company ceases trading>>



The efforts described are typical of what happens in these cases. Alarm is raised when the crisis occurs, those who can make a decision have other things to think about, our efforts are ad hoc and seemingly self-interested (who gets the stuff). But there's a lot more to it than that. BAC is a responsible outfit and I'm sure they and others have given thought to how these matters should be handled. What is lacking (so far as I'm aware) is a Protocol endorsed by r/keepers and stakeholders (in this case historians have been asked to “testify” as to the value of Th. Cook Archive). But an established, documented Protocol would have several virtues:



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

- It would concentrate our own thinking ahead of crisis-management, ensuring the issues were clearly thought-out and tactics developed in advance;
- It could be presented on the basis of social responsibility rather than self-interest;
- It would be something we could socialise amongst stakeholders in advance (including a responsible corporate audience) so they would be dealing with something that had status not just a knee-jerk reaction.

Leaving aside the issue of government subsidy, ownership, or control (which may bring in questions of public ownership and control) and the possibility of legal dispute over private ownership, the cases that arise generally fall into 3 categories (not necessarily mutually exclusive) and the way forward differs for each.

- Legacy records (including the archives if any) are part of the assets of the business and are managed as a necessary basis for continuing operations. This is the case, for example, with insurance, banking, health and care providers, social welfare, etc. where the records and the customer-base are integral to the future operation of the business.
- Legacy records are “part of the furniture” regarded by liquidators or new owners only as to their monetary sale value or as a tax write-off. A liquidator, for example, taking this attitude would need to decide how to handle a saleable asset to the benefit of creditors and whether they were entitled to simply give it away.
- Legacy records are recognised as a social obligation the handling of which has moral and reputational dimensions for any business taking over the defunct concern.

What should be done involves a spectrum of possibilities (selling it, donating it, depositing it but retaining management, depositing it and divesting day-to-day management under agreed protocols, giving it away altogether, etc. etc.) Just framing the issues this way would take most companies a long way towards a better understanding of what they are dealing with. A fourth issue has to do with what I’ll call “formed archives” (though I hate the term and the idea). This occurs when

- A business swallows the entire archives of another company (or union, NGO, etc.) and maintains them intact w/o addition or depletion.
- A business lives long enough (as with Th. Cook) to form an archives programme distinct from other business operations.



In both these cases, it is relevant to ask whether a distinction should be made between the formed archive and other business records many of which would still be used in ongoing business operations. This was the case with SBV in 1990, when the formed archive went to CBA (to be lodged with PROV) but a huge quantity of records (some of which would have come to SBV Archives in due course) remained scudding about in the infrastructure taken over by CBA. The result is that SBV’s formed archives halt abruptly, not with cessation of SBV operations in 1990 but with the 1990 intakes into SBV Archives (PROV accepted no



further deposits) and the pre-1990 archives that never made it to SBVA (if they survive) are now most likely with CBA Archives or in a basement somewhere. Yet another kind of situation arises when a business downsizes, divesting itself of part of its business (usually by sale) but remaining in operation in other areas. If a formed archive is involved this can give rise to issues of splitting and allocation of future responsibility for management, public access, intellectual property, legal liability and dispute, residual claims, as well as future costs.

None of these things is simple and even if we think we know the answers others may not agree. Sorting them out as part of managing a particular crisis is not a good way to go about it. What I think is needed there and here is a more formal Protocol worked out in advance of any particular crisis. Involving r/keepers and stakeholders but also some of our more thoughtful corporate citizens. This would set out the issues (as above) and document desirable outcomes anticipating as many situations as possible. This Protocol could be promoted amongst businesses and other organisations known to have significant deposits and be at hand when each new crisis arises. A Joint Working Party (representing r/keepers, stakeholders, and - one hopes - corporations) could be on-call to manage our end of the business when crises occur. Bear in mind that for every Th. Cook Saga, there are others where the archives just slip away unnoticed. Bear in mind also that corporations will sometimes resent our intrusion at such times and perceive it to be unwarranted interference in their sensitive business affairs.

It is worth noting (in response to the cry: who's going to do this?) that development and promulgation of such a Protocol (and even facilitation of a Joint Working Party) seems to fall within NAA's national remit:

- 5(2)(b) encourage and foster the preservation of all other archival resources relating to Australia;
- 5(2)(g) With the approval of the Minister, to accept and have the care and management of material that, though not part of the archival resources of the Commonwealth, forms part of archival resources relating to Australia and, in the opinion of the Minister, ought to be in the care of the Archives in order to ensure its preservation or for any other reason;
- 5(2)(h) conduct research, and provide advice, in relation to the management and preservation of records and other archival material; and
- 5(2)(l) develop and foster the co-ordination of activities relating to the preservation and use of the archival resources of the Commonwealth and other archival resources relating to Australia.

In case it has slipped your mind “other archival resources relating to Australia” is a broader term than “archival resources of the Commonwealth”. The narrower term means, *inter alia*,

3(2) ... such Commonwealth records and other material as are of national significance or public interest and relate to:

(a) the history or government of Australia;

(d) the history or government of a Territory; or

and is limited (as a result of turf wars when their Act was being drafted) e.g.

but do not include:

(f) material that, in the opinion of the Minister, ought to be in the archives of another country or in the archives of an international organization;

(g) material that relates only or principally to the history or government of a State or the Northern Territory or of a Colony that became part of the Commonwealth, not being:

(h) material, other than Commonwealth records, relating only to a place that has been, but has ceased to be, a Territory;

Even under that limited definition, NAA has a role in the non-government sector in relation to “material of national significance or public interest” that are not Commonwealth records.





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

But we made the operation of “other archival resources relating to Australia” even broader so as to give effect to the responsibilities assigned to NAA under 5(2)(b), 5(2)(g), 5(2)(h), and 5(2)(i) – viz. documenting the history of Australia and taking part (if not leading) efforts to preserve and document its archival heritage.

**<<Andrew Waugh: ... The legal responsibility of a receiver or liquidator is to achieve the best (monetary) outcome for the creditors ... the legacy records can \*only\* be considered as assets by receivers and liquidators ... Neither receivers or liquidators can simply give assets away ... The effect is that Thomas Cooks' archive would be extremely difficult to save unless some organisation is willing to buy them - and in this case they may be outbid by a dealer in ephemera. It would need a legal change to safeguard such archives. A simple change would be to assign a nominal value to such archives (e.g. a tax credit) that could be unlocked by the liquidator by passing ownership to a recognised archive. You'd still need to find an archive willing to accept the records, but this would mean that the archives would have a simple value and there would be an incentive for the receiver/liquidator to find a home for them.>>**

Even so, sometimes the legacy records are seen as having no market value (are even seen as a liability). Market value is different to business usefulness for an ongoing concern or purchaser. And another issue for an ongoing business or purchaser may be reputational damage arising from perceived mishandling of the archives. But all of this needs to be thought through and set out beforehand, not in the midst of a crisis.

### **2019, October 1:**

**<<Adrian Cunningham: More about the Thomas Cook archives in the UK edition of [The Conversation](#) ...>>**

**<<Michael Piggott: ... I notice one of the article's links go to a UK group called the Organisational History Network which is trying to rally support for the Thomas Cook Archive. A couple of blog posts in response made me smile (thinking of the state of Australian business archives, and that wonderful word 'should'):**

- **'There should surely be a legal requirement that long established companies maintain, or hand over to the government archive system, their significant archives. For instance the respected and longstanding company Costain apparently destroyed all their prewar archives, greatly frustrating historical research.'**
- **'The archives should go to the British Library or the National Archive at Kew to ensure they remain available to future historians.'>>**

### **2019, October 2:**

In an earlier post, I suggested setting in place arrangements to deal with these crises before they occur. From the *Conversation* article, it appears the BAC has done just that. Good on 'em.

**<<-'There should surely be a legal requirement that long established companies maintain, or hand over to the government archive system, their significant archives. For instance the respected and longstanding company Costain apparently destroyed all their prewar archives, greatly frustrating historical research.'>>**

This would be very difficult under our system of law which views such records as property. Property rights are not absolutely sacred (as one who may soon be losing his house to compulsory resumption for road-widening, I can testify to that!) but, in principle, interference with private property is (rightly) frowned upon. There needs to be some over-riding public good (eminent domain) and compensation must be paid (in the case of the C'wealth it's in the Constitution - on "just terms" cf. *The Castle*). This all makes it very



difficult to draft replevin clauses in our archives laws for dealing with official estrays (leaving aside the question of proof that an estray still belongs to the Government).

For public records, estray provisions may involve compulsory acquisition (return to official custody) or merely the imposition of limitations on what the possessor of the estray can do with it. In Victoria, a "prescribed" record must be offered to PROV and if not acquired, it may be sold or gifted, but on each subsequent occasion PROV must be offered it again. NSW provisions are somewhat more draconian but in both cases it can be argued that Govt is entitled to interfere in dealings with what are (or were) its own property. Of course, in recent times, all sorts of statutory limitations on dealings with official documents have been developed but that has more to do with content and secrecy than the materiality of the stuff. The question of property vs cultural ownership and control (leaving aside the whole question of copyright) is highly vexed (cf. Elgin Marbles, Aboriginal artefacts in museums, cultural appropriation, etc.). Perhaps we could make a case that mishandling business records is cultural misappropriation of the heritage of post-industrial Western entrepreneurs.

Interference with dealings in non-government records would be more akin to heritage protection laws in the public interest rather than identity protection, e.g. preservation orders on buildings. These apply to heritage sites (both Aboriginal and European). Export controls do exist on art, artefacts, and documentary materials I believe (but I'm hazy) and I doubt they're often applied to records. As far as I'm aware, little has ever been done to protect movable cultural heritage (as it's sometimes called) in the same way as the built environment. And, of course, protecting our natural environment is a big issue. I suppose that now we are **re-moving** statues of historical figures who are no longer seen as cool, even heavy statuary comes under the term movable cultural heritage.

Someone once told me that some of the European countries have heritage protection laws applicable to records in the private sector, but I never followed it up.

### **2019, November 18: How collections end**

#### **<<Joanna Sassoon:...a new collection in the BJHS entitled 'How collections end'**

"Collections are made and maintained for pleasure, for status, for nation or empire building, for cultural capital, as a substrate for knowledge production and for everything in between. In asking how collections end, we shift the focus from acquisition and growth to erosion, loss and decay, and expose the intellectual, material and curatorial labour required to maintain collections.">>

**<<In asking how collections end, we shift the focus from acquisition and growth to erosion, loss and decay, and expose the intellectual, material and curatorial labour required to maintain collections>>**

On the question of erosion, there's been a lot of fuss in the last month or so about what the Tasmanian National Trust has been doing with its collection – specifically selling off unwanted donations made to them over the years, The latest broadside is in [today's Oz](#):

Tasmania's National Trust has quietly tried to sell more than 50 heritage items in its collection, sparking outrage from members, supporters and heritage experts, some of whom see it as a "betrayal". Those concerned at the sell-off ... criticise the process as "secretive" and lacking consultation. They believe the sale ... is an insult to the people who donated them ... They were concerned the sale fell short of best practice for disposal of unwanted collection items, known as deaccessioning. Margaret Birtley, a museum and heritage consultant and member of several National Trust Victoria advisory committees, said this meant prior consultation with the public, members and donors or their heirs, and attempts to house the items in other public institutions ...

In my experience, museums are far more likely than archives and libraries to demand transfer of title., Perhaps this is why.



**2020, August 21:**

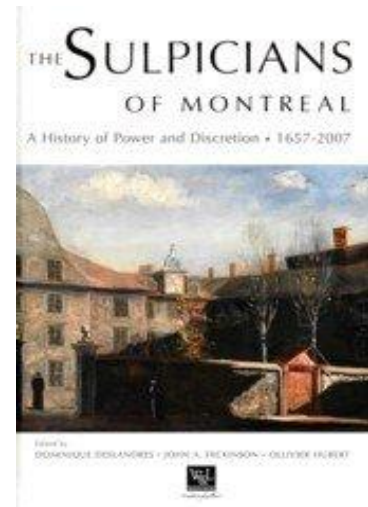
Posted on the Canadian List

... the Sulpician archives in Montreal has made all its professional archive staff redundant - a total of six positions. This leaves one of the most important collections in Canada, bearing witness to the history of New France, at extreme risk...

Here is [the link](#) to the article in Le Devoir:

Taken from the article:

... The employees had to immediately hand over the numbered combinations of the vaults and the archives. Six employees were escorted to the door, flanked by a security guard who does not normally work there ... Many documents and objects require control and monitoring, especially in this season when large variations in temperature lead to high humidity levels ...



What protocols are there (or should there be) for the dissolution and/or disbursement of archival “collections” or their handover to philistines? Many endings are abrupt and poorly planned. There's been chatter on this list about Thomas Cook and the Fairfax photos. I have been involved in a few – notably the State Bank of Victoria Archives from both ends. I was in my last days at PROV when CBA took over SBV and there was a public outcry that the [SBV Archives](#) must not go to Sydney – with the result that the “collection” was put on permanent loan to PROV. What didn't seem to be properly considered was that the “collection” was fed from the recordkeeping process at SBV which was still in operation and continued well after the transfer while the business was being wound up. No arrangements were made to continue feeding SBV records into the “collection” now held at PROV. The result was that the uncollected material sloshing about in the subsumed entity and beyond while the affairs of SBV were being finalised remained in the hands of CBA. No arrangements were made to continue feeding this material into the SBV Archive so that, in due course, some of it found its way, while I was in charge there, into [CBA Archives](#) in Sydney where a sort of phantom SBV Archives began to grow – including the so-called National Money Box Collection assembled by SBV but not, apparently, made part of the SBV Archives holdings prior to the takeover. The same thing happened after 1960 when CBA 1 split into CBA 2 and RBA and the RBA took the former Archives. But a lot of pre-1960 stuff remained (including some stuff about other merged entities) which, like the SBV residue, became part of CBA Archives.

By way of contrast. the CML Archives, acquired by CBA in 2000 and kept separate within CBA Archives, nevertheless had a strong relation to other CBA Archives holdings derived from the continuation by CBA of business under the "Colonial" brand. But the distinction between the former CML Archives and CBA's Colonial-brand records still had to be kept since there was no business continuity because there had been an intervening merger between CML and State Bank NSW (formerly Rural Bank). Interestingly, Rural Bank itself had been hived off from the NSW Government Bank that went bust in the Depression and was absorbed at that time by CBA 1 (minus the Rural Bank). It's all enough to make your head spin.

<<[Deb Leigo](#):...We know how change should be managed. Do you see a way for the situation to change from ad hoc and unplanned?>>.

**2020, August 22:**

Frog-marching you to the door and taking your keys! That is what corporations do if they fear you are disgruntled enough to harm their assets. How could they have so misread the archival ethos? It seems too crazy to be true. But, even if the reportage is exaggerated, the



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

power and incomprehension are familiar enough. Closure, merger, and dissolution aren't always ad hoc and unplanned as the process now under way in NSW clearly shows, but the incomprehension is there all the same. And the outcome is more or less the same in any event. How do we deal with that? Do we mitigate (as some have argued we should) or do we fight?

We're up for a fight as the ASA submission to the NSW Committee demonstrates, but we're also prepared to collaborate to get a better deal (if Andrew's interpretation of the D-G's evidence is correct). We've had some wins in the past and we've had some losses. I worry a bit that we seem to adhere too defensively to the status quo when dealing with ill-informed threats. For us to embrace right-thinking change is just as necessary as it is for us to oppose wrong-headed change when needed. And tactically that is a way to take the initiative.

In my little presentation to the archives students on [activism](#), I identified two qualities needed to uphold our ethos – focus and persistence. How unfocussed we are has been demonstrated in evidence before the NSW Committee. What ensues there may now test our persistence. If the merger goes ahead, do we resist or collaborate? Past experience suggests that, having lost, collaboration is our most likely response to being trampled on. So perhaps the mitigators are right, after all.

***God have mercy on such as we – baa, baa, baa.***

**2020, August 27:**

For the benefit of those who don't subscribe to the Canadian List -

"Minister Nathalie Roy is taking action. As announced last week, the Minister of Culture and Communications has just requested the classification not only of the archives of the Company of the Priests of Saint-Sulpice, but also the rare books and movable goods that the Sulpicians have since collected. their arrival in Montreal in 1657.

The government confirmed on August 25 that Minister Roy "recently signed a notice of intent to classify to ensure they are protected" under the Cultural Heritage Act...."

**2019, December 8: [Where will all the archives be?](#)**

Faith in our government r/keeping systems is predicated on the idea that a "full and accurate record" can be maintained and preserved under a regulatory mandate. But does evolutionary change in the way public business is conducted invalidate the premiss on which that regulatory mandate is based? Archives laws are written on the basis of assumptions about the way institutions function. Is the role of the public service being reduced to "service-delivery" while policy-making is undertaken beyond the reach of transparency and archiving? [Laura Tingle thinks so.](#)

Shortly after the federal election, I had a conversation with a figure at the very centre of the Government. [Had the PM] detected a weariness with the ideological wars of politics among disconnected voters, and recognised political self-interest in shaping both the Government's message, and its agenda, around the basics of government service delivery? Did this mean the Government might abandon some of its ideological warfare against institutions? "Don't be ridiculous," this person snorted. "If anything, this Government is more ideologically driven than Abbott. They want to win the culture wars they see in education, in the public service, in all of our institutions,

... while people have talked about the growing role of ministerial offices and advisers for decades, this week's announcement really crystallises a trend to the sidelining of the public service as a frontline provider of policy advice ....The Prime Minister [has] reflected on how he had told public servants soon after the election "about having a very strong focus on the delivery of services because that's what Government is there to do". "I want a public service that's very much focussed on implementation....Whether... they're preparing research, the policy they're developing, services they're delivering on the ground and





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

ensuring that could be done efficiently and keep Australians connected to them in the work they do each day."

.. The underlying message from the Prime Minister is really a reflection of the fact that policy is largely driven by ministers and their offices these days, rather than a clear line of process that involves public servants, and/or the people who have been commissioned by the Government itself to advise it ...Once things are decided in a minister's office, the scope for even the parliament to find out what has happened is immediately constrained ...

If these new changes mean even less policy flows out of the public service, what hope have we of knowing who is making the decisions, and on what rationale, in areas that the Government doesn't feel like talking about or prioritising, like the arts? It is hard to see any discussion coming up in Estimates, for starters. Public servants are now supposed to be the facilitators of policy rather than its authors, but, in fact, particularly under Coalition governments, they have often become little more than post boxes for the outsourcing of contracts to the private sector. There's too little transparency.

**<<Adrian Cunningham: ...The trend towards Ministers' offices carrying out more and more of the really important work of government has been going on for many years. In the Commonwealth the Archives Act is deeply unsatisfactory in its handling of the records of official business that are (or should be) created in Ministers' offices. This gap desperately needs to be fixed, but I don't sense any appetite to do so...In Queensland the (more recent) Public Records Act very definitely and explicitly includes Ministers' offices within its scope...[but]...The Qld Act is vague on enforcement... So, it is good that people like Laura Tingle are drawing attention to the issue. We need to build a public groundswell to address the problem to help give us a truly healthy, transparent and accountable democracy. But pigs might fly too.>>**

The roles that our government archives have themselves adopted change over time.

1. **Stage 1:** Their origins are as memory institutions – not as a memory for citizens or the “nation” (itself a concept only a couple of centuries old) but as a memory for government of precedent and of favours bestowed and duties owed.
2. **Stage 2:** More recently, following the precedent set by the French revolutionaries, they now proclaim themselves to be guardians of the nation’s memory – enter historians and other third-party users – available as a mechanism for scrutinising government activity and (by extension) upholding accountability. The records supporting this claim are “policy” and transactional records of general or public interest. Particular instance data is embedded in records with a different primary purpose (e.g. accounts and charters).
3. **Stage 3:** In the last two centuries, the involvement of government with the daily doings of individuals (persons and corporations) has extended comprehensively so that for the last 100 years it has been scarcely possible to escape. This has led to an explosion of particular instance recordkeeping which are the focus now of interest by individuals about themselves.

**Pre-Tudor**, records survive because of their rarity. Until more regular processes emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many policy and transactional records are classified as State Papers and ended up in esoteric repositories such as muniment rooms and libraries. Then came the apogee of the historical archives – e.g, Colonial Office archives bearing witty marginalia made by well-educated clerks on incoming governors’ despatches and internal memoranda.

**Prior to 1800**, inter-actions with government were slight. There was no income tax. Revenue was raised by excise or customs that left transactional records but not data pertaining to individuals. Private corporations could only be established by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament. Births, deaths and marriages were documented by the Church. A regular Census has been conducted in the UK only since 1801. In the pre-digital age, the most extensive use of surviving particular instance data was by genealogists. They were



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

sometimes looked down upon as distracting from our work supporting what were once called genuine or serious researchers. Digitisation has changed all that.

Government archives have been furiously digitising their particular instance records and striking sweetheart deals with Mormons and Ancestry thereby aggressively adopting a service-delivery role. Born digital records will open new vistas for greater retention and exploitation of particular instance data (with privacy the most likely obstacle for everyone except government archives which have wangled a special status for themselves) but born-digital may soon become available using new delivery channels that could do the archives out of any kind of role.



The purpose of this potted history is to suggest that, despite the rhetoric that government archives fulfil a memory and/or accountability role, they may have imperceptibly (and possibly without realising the implications for themselves) adopted a service-delivery role which may set them up well for an era of de-institutionalisation, as practised by Morrison and like-minded subverters of our democratic freedoms. To suggest also that our government archives need to think very hard about what they wish to be and, as the old adage says, to be careful what they wish for.

**2019, December 9:**

**<< We need to build a public groundswell to address the problem to help give us a truly healthy, transparent and accountable democracy. But pigs might fly too>>**

This just in:

[Australia's civil rights rating downgraded as report finds world becoming less free](#)

The world is becoming less free and, in Asia, almost nobody lives in a country where civil rights are not being eroded or repressed, a new civil rights report has found. And the **2019 CIVICUS Monitor**, a global research collaboration that tracks fundamental freedoms in 196 countries, has downgraded Australia from an "open" country to one where civil space has "narrowed", citing new laws to expand government surveillance, prosecution of whistleblowers, and raids on media organisations.

... In 12 countries assessed across the Pacific, including Australia, more than half were rated as "open" by CIVICUS ... But CIVICUS said "the most alarming deterioration in civic space [across the Pacific] is occurring in Australia, which has been downgraded from 'open' to 'narrowed'". Australia has seen the recent criminal justice examples of the prosecution of whistleblower Witness K, who exposed Australian bugging of ally East Timor's cabinet room under the guise of a benevolent aid project, and the secret trial of Witness J, who was tried, convicted, and sentenced on national security charges in complete secrecy.

... CIVICUS said freedom of the press was under particular threat in Australia, with raids on journalists' homes and on media organisations. Whistleblowers are targeted for exposing government wrongdoing and face prosecution under the Intelligence Services Act. Technology companies are facing an environment of increasing surveillance with new legislation passed which will force IT companies to hand over user information even if it is



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

encrypted. “New laws in Australia are creating a chilling effect on freedom of expression, especially for journalists and whistleblowers seeking to expose issues of public interest,” CIVICUS UN adviser Lyndal Rowlands said. “Other new legislation seems to give the government inappropriate powers to allow for unjustified encroachments on Australians’ right to privacy.”

It might be argued that archivists can whittle and chew gum at the same time – that service-delivery does not preclude support for memory/accountability. Indeed, I once thought that myself and have more recently heard that argument put by some government archivists. Agreed, though I have now long advocated a separation of the two roles. There are three issues at stake: how well we perform both roles, how well we ourselves understand the balance between them, how well our duality is perceived and valued by others. Is it likely, do you think, that Morrison, Dutton, Porter, et al would understand it or value it if they did? How much more likely that they would want to de-institutionalise the memory/accountability mechanism in favour of the service-delivery role.

In the current political climate, if I were a government archivist, contemplating changes to my enabling legislation is the last thing I would do, Unless, of course, I was minded to transition more boldly into service-delivery (or else too stupid to understand the implications).

**<<Adrian Cunningham: ...the first question is what should be good for the nation?...I would say...:**

- **in the Commonwealth it is not good that there are no clear requirements on Ministerial offices to make and keep good records**
- **in Queensland is good that there is a clear requirement for Ministerial offices to make and keep good records**
- **In Queensland it is not good that there is no proper enforcement regime for the above provision.**

**... Legislation needs to be clear about how enforcement should be pursued and by whom. Whoever has the enforcement role needs sufficient power, resources and independence to pursue their role without the risk of being constrained by those who they are meant to police. How should government archives fit into this? They certainly don't have to be the enforcers ,,,>>**

In [\*Political pressure and the archival record revisited\*](#), I set out a table of possible roles that could be assigned to a government archives authority – viz. ordainer, preceptor, mentor, facilitator, provider, enabler, monitor, watch-dog, enforcer, and auditor. Some of these are mutually exclusive. It is axiomatic, for example that auditors are never enforcers and that the ordainer cannot be the auditor (because the ordainer’s performance is also subject to audit scrutiny as well as the performance of those subject to the ordainer’s edicts).

**<<At present in Qld the PR Act implies that QSA is the enforcer (it has powers of inspection and can report to Parliament - providing both the DG and the Minister approve the reports in question).>>**

I would not describe this as enforcement. In my table this role would fit more appropriately under “monitor” or “watch-dog” where the archives authority detects lapses but someone else must act. The role of “enforcer” goes further -

**Watch-Dog with Teeth** : Involves compulsion or inflicting penalties – directing others, detecting transgressions, altering behaviour by punishment/sanction.

**<< I wish for a proper regime of enforcement – not necessarily that the govt archives should be that enforcer.>>**

It seems to me that the more relevant question (and in many ways the prior question) is how r/keeping requirements are enforced rather than who does it. Many of our laws have criminal penalties and little else beside. But, unlike most laws with criminal sanctions,



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

archives laws are directed at misbehaviour by public officials not the citizenry. It turns out that governments hate prosecuting ministers, advisers, or officials for bad r/keeping (which they don't regard as all that serious in the first place) and that proving misdemeanours to the standard required for criminal offence is extremely difficult. What is needed is a powerful regime that modifies behaviour on an on-going basis rather than punishing past lapses. Past lapses should be punished (short of criminal conviction) only where the possibility exists of sinister intent (e.g. an intention to deceive, mislead, or obscure wrongdoing such as fraud or malfeasance).



### **2019, December 13:**

Further to the relationship between r/keeping and the way government business is conducted, with particular reference to the role and accountability of advisers, comes this [Friday 13<sup>th</sup> announcement](#) –

The Morrison government has rebuffed a recommendation that it establish a legislated code of conduct for ministerial advisers, professing itself happy with the status quo. The recommendation to bring ministerial advisers into a clearer accountability framework is contained in the long awaited [Thodey review](#) of the public service, which was released by the prime minister, Scott Morrison, on Friday ... The Thodey review referenced debates in recent years that ministerial advisers ... should be made more accountable through parliamentary scrutiny in the same way public servants are held to account by committees, like Senate estimates ...

But the prime minister pushed back ... The government argued the current expectation was that “all ministerial staff to uphold the highest standards of integrity” and appropriate behaviour was already enforced ...

Is this the moment for a press release from ASA urging that advisers and their activities be brought unambiguously within the scope of the archives laws? And explaining why.

### **2020, January 14: [NAA website](#)**

<<[Joanna Sassoon](#): Has anyone noticed that the wonderful Fact Sheets produced by the National Archives of Australia are no longer available on the refreshed NAA website. Anyone know why this is the case? And see what [common website](#) you get when looking for the wonderful resource Uncommon lives.>>

<<[Tim Sharratt](#):...they were victims of the recent website migration. The content of some fact sheets is still there and some addresses do redirect, but many give 404 errors. The demise of Uncommon Lives was particularly disappointing. I and others have raised this with the NAA, but to no avail. There's a post about the development of Uncommon Lives (with links to versions in the Internet Archive) on [Kate Bagnall's blog](#). You might also note that direct links into RecordSearch (created for example by Zotero) will now be broken as the script that handles them has not been redirected....The whole migration process doesn't seem to have been very well managed.>>





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

<<**Andrew Wilson**: Yes NAA is always breaking its website URLs. I've been teaching digital preservation at Charles Sturt Uni for a number of years and every year, even when there is no wholesale website migration, there are a broken links. I've almost completely given up referring to any NAA material for that reason.>>

**2020, January 31:**

<<**Tim Sharratt**: ...Just to quantify the great NAA fact sheet cull of 2019, I grabbed the most current index from the Wayback Machine and tried retrieving all of the fact sheets. Only 15 of 266 still seem to survive in some form. The other 251 return 'Not Found' errors...>>

This thread provides a nice illustration of the accountability discussion. To whom is NAA accountable? And how might we use direct action to make them so? The public likely to have a direct interest in this issue would be relatively small - ourselves and researchers who use the NAA website. Not too hard to organise?

But what if NAA has metrics to demonstrate low use of the Fact Sheets? I can't see that there would be much cost to preserving the Fact Sheets even if they didn't produce new ones. But, if they give quality assistance to only a minority of users, so what? This harks back to the service delivery issue raised by Laura Tingle. Is it NAA's job to provide demand-driven services or services appropriate to their mission.

**2020, March 19: Safe Haven**

Some subscribers to the History Channel who are following [Portillo's Hidden History of Britain](#) will have learned in episode 3 (just screened) something I didn't know. Shepton Mallet Prison (now closed) was used to store documents from the PRO (as it then was) during WWII.

With the outbreak of war the prison also took into protective storage many important historical documents from the Public Record Office in London, including Domesday Book, the logbooks of HMS Victory, the Olive Branch Petition (1775), and dispatches from the Battle of Waterloo. In all about 300 tons of records were transported to Shepton Mallet. Some documents, but not Domesday Book, were moved out of Shepton Mallet on 5 July 1942 due to concern at the concentration of important items being held in one place, especially with German bombs falling on nearby [Bath](#) and [Bristol](#). During their time at Shepton Mallet the archives were still able to be accessed.<sup>[45]</sup> The archives were returned to London after the end of the war, between 10 July 1945 and 1 February 1946. [Wikipedia](#)

A nice addition to the unresolvable debate over whether artefacts are safer collected or distributed.

**2020, March 21:**

<<**Michael Piggott**: Not totally unrelated, Chris' interesting post has stirred a vague memory that in 19th and early 20th century NSW prisons, the warrants (?) by which prisoners were legally held were once kept in storerooms in those imposing forbidding structures forming the prisons' front entrances. If rioting prisoners were able to burn them down instead of dormitories etc, technically they could have walked free. Being of an age justifying special treatment in toilet roll queues, the memory's probably false. Comments please.>>

**2020, April 3: Something else to worry about**

Time at home gives us an opportunity to look about the Internet. Dangerous, of course, because there's a lot of nutty stuff out there and packaging your own interpretation of the data without the necessary expertise is the very stuff of fake news. I came across stories about how [Jakarta is sinking](#). Really badly. Thought about the effects of that on [Indonesia's memory palaces](#). That led me ask myself about how vulnerable archives buildings are elsewhere. A list of [cities at risk](#) includes Washington and Beijing.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

I'm sure our institutions include flooding and rising water tables in their risk assessment plans. Archives aren't easy to move and it would be interesting to know which are most vulnerable. NAUK is situated along the river where [the risk is substantial](#). There are maps showing [areas of greatest risk](#). And, comparing the London map with the location map for NAUK (snugly situated in a bend in the river), it looks to me as if they are at risk of inundation at some point.

I wonder if there is any survey of institutions world-wide that are in a similar situation. Risk assessment undertaken singly is all very well but might it not be useful (should an international effort ever be mounted) to have the data that would enable relative risk to be assessed? Not just a retrospective evaluation of the memory-of-the-world but a prospective view of its future survival? Come to think of it, a comprehensive evaluation of risks of all kinds would be valuable alongside registration. Perhaps it already exists?

<<**Elizabeth**: The closest thing I know is [this project](#)>>



It is “the first to our knowledge to investigate the spatial variability of climate risks to libraries and archives and detail how this may change in the future under expected climate change.” Good work! But it illustrates the complexity and the difficulty involved. The answer will always depend upon how the question is framed. If you ask “how will climate change affect archives” this is the kind of answer you get. But, serious though that is, it may not be the best answer. The [list of cities at risk](#) doesn't suggest that climate change is the only problem:

- **Jakarta** : “ rising sea levels and the over-extraction of groundwater”
- **Houston** : “like Jakarta, the [over-extraction of groundwater](#) is partly to blame”
- **Lagos** : “the coastline has already been [eroding](#). As sea levels rise due to global warming, the city is increasingly at risk”
- **New Orleans** : “vulnerable to rising sea levels because it was built on loose soil and was positioned so close to on the coast”
- **Beijing** : “the cause of the sinking was depleting groundwater, similar to the situation in Jakarta and Houston”
- **Washington** : “unlike Jakarta, Washington's sinking has nothing to do with aquifers or rising sea levels -- it's actually because of an ice sheet from the last ice age ... When the ice sheet melted, thousands of years ago, the land settled back down. The researchers now believe that the area is gradually sinking, a process that could last thousands of years.”



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

So, what are the variables:

- **Natural vs Human?** Climate change, earthquake, tsunami, land slip, groundwater depletion, fire, flooding, etc. etc. require a different evaluation to security (arson, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, civil war, and so forth).
- **Local vs Global?** Will the impact be widespread geographically or localised. NANZ in Wellington is below sea level on land reclaimed from the harbour and on the North/South fault line running down a country prone to earthquakes. A common risk in that country but not the same risk factor everywhere else. [When I was there, I suggested the only safe place for NZ's cultural heritage was Australia but that wasn't thought feasible.]
- **Impact vs Probability?** The standard [risk assessment tool](#) for co-ordinating impact and likelihood.

Lots more variables to be considered, I'm sure. What we need, by way of a beginning, is a risk evaluation template for archives. Don't hold your breath.

**2020, April 30:**

The ICA is conducting [a survey](#) to register risks to documentary heritage. It seems to focus rather more on status quo than the kind of existential threats mentioned at the beginning of this thread (global warming, sea levels, subsidence, rising water tables, etc.). I take "flood" to mean inundation and overflowing rivers, king tides and the like. The survey seeks data on

### Previous events

- **Damages:** Fire; Moisture; Falling debris; Dust; Insect, pests, microorganisms; Lack of maintenance; Building or structural damages; Damages to the electric system; Damages to the hydraulic system; Interruptions [sic] of communications (telephone, computers, internet, access to digital records); Loss of staff; Lack of security measures; Lack of budget to operate; Other
- **Disasters:** Earthquake; Flood; Storms; Hurricane; Fire; Chemical damage; Civil disturbance; Theft; Illicit trafficking of documentary heritage; Armed conflict; Earthquake; Flood; Storms; Hurricane; Fire; Chemical damage; Civil disturbance; Theft; Illicit trafficking of documentary heritage; Armed conflict; Other

### Future hazards

- **Meteorological:** Storm / rain / cyclone; Hurricane; Typhoon; Tornado; Ice storm; Dust storm
- **Hydrological:** Flood; Tsunami
- **Geological:** Volcanic, Earthquake
- **Biological:** Pest infestation (rodents, animals, insects, others); Microorganisms (bacteria, virus, mould); Diseases
- **Human induced:** Fire; Pollution; Social or political conflict; War; Technological hazard
- **Chemical:** Radioactive; Nitrate (film, cellulose)
- **Other(s)**

The Survey seeks information about measures taken for prevention, response, and recovery.

**2020, November 5: [What would you do if you were independently wealthy?](#)**

<<**Andrew Waugh:** Note that her [collection](#) has been digitised by the Internet Archive and is available online>>

**2020, November 7:**

[Collections](#) are often catalogued, sorted, and objectively maintained.





## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

... There are those who have surpassed healthy collecting behavior and can be considered hoarders. Mere collecting can cross into the realm of [hoarding](#) when it also becomes pathological ... The differences between collecting and hoarding are apparent: Items in a collection are neatly organized, maintained, and presented or manipulated with ease ... Collections are often catalogued, sorted, and objectively maintained like books in a library. Hoarding behavior is the opposite. Items with no value or clear utility are piled in stacks with neither order nor reason. Steven W. Anderson, a neurologist specializing in hoarding behavior, posits that the need to collect stems from the basic drive to collect basic supplies such as food ... Anderson has found that many compulsive hoarders with [brain injuries](#) have suffered damage to a region of their brain responsible for the regulation of cognitive behaviors such as decision making, information processing, and organizing behavior—the prefrontal cortex. Those with brain injuries who did not display hoarding behavior possessed no damage to their [frontal cortex](#), but showed damage distributed throughout the right and left hemispheres of their brain.

Good to know.

### 2020, November 12:

A Christie's sale of "Nasa photos" [reported in The Guardian](#) does not, despite the headline, appear to be a sale of Nasa archives. It is, instead, the hoard of a private collector gathered from many sources – including (interestingly) some of the astronauts themselves. What then is being sold: the artefact, the image (one copy of it), the copyright, or the archive (collection)? I'd say it's the archive (i.e. the collection made by M. Martin-Malburet) that is being sold off but by the sound of it, it's going to be sold piece-meal. So, the archive is being broken up and sold off as single images (copies of them). In some cases, one supposes, these will be the only extant copies of the image involved. In any case, their potential for display "in various guises" is being diminished.

... the collection of 2,400 vintage images across 700 lots [is] featured on the Christie's of London website ... Bidding starts at £100 (about \$132) for many of the photographs in [the auction](#) Christie's estimates that some of the better-known images will reach in excess of £50,000 (\$66,000) individually. "The collection is the most comprehensive private collection of Nasa photographs ever presented at auction, and spans every visual milestone of the space program, from the early days of Mercury, the technical advances of Gemini and lunar orbiter, to the triumphs of Apollo," Christie's said [in a press release](#) promoting the sale

...

Voyage to Another World: the Victor Martin-Malburet Photograph Collection is a chronological journey of humankind's achievements in space beginning with the [early days of rocketry](#) in the 1940s to the first color photograph of Earth and the moon together in the [same still image](#), taken from the Voyager 1 space probe in 1977. Amassed by Martin-Malburet, a 39-year-old Frenchman who has been hoarding space images from his teen years when he had dreams of becoming an astronaut, parts of the collection have been displayed in various guises over the years ...

While the smaller number of landmark photographs are familiar to space enthusiasts, the vast majority of the collection is being seen publicly for the first time, having been hidden in archives for decades and viewed previously only by researchers at Nasa's Johnson space center in Houston, Texas, or the Russian space agency Roscosmos ... Martin-Malburet, whose father was a prominent collector of 20th-century avant garde art in Paris, acquired his space collection from auctions, private collectors and dealers, and some directly from the astronauts themselves ...

Once a collection is formed, legalities aside, what is the professional view of its being broken-up? Is it an appraisal issue? Is the break-up of a "significant" collection more heinous than one of little intrinsic value. Who decides the value? More profoundly, for appraisal generally, is "value" relative? I remember some torrid debates with Victorian train buffs about railway records.





## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Just to add another twist to the theme of archival “collections” and to hark back to earlier threads on this List concerning the fate of the Fairfax Photos, a month ago [The NZ Herald](#) had a curious report about memorabilia relating (no surprises here) to the All Blacks-

An [online auction](#) is underway selling rare New Zealand rugby pictures that were once thought lost forever. Two hundred pictures from the archives of Fairfax's New Zealand papers are being sold by the collection's American owner. In 2013, an American company which was digitising the collection went into receivership and the photos were eventually sold to a California art dealer, Daniel Miller. Miller bought the entire collection of vintage photographs with the goal of repatriating them to New Zealand. The head of art at Webb's Auction House, Charles Ninow, said the collection could sell for more than \$100,000. "It's anybody's guess but I anticipate this collection will sell for over \$100,000." ...

I thought it was Miller who had acquired the images of Fairfax Australia. Are there two lots? Anyway, the link to the online auction leads you to a page on Webb's Online Auction Portal where the sale referred to is described as “The Fairfax Archives: New Zealand Rugby 1920-1949” auction now CLOSED. As so often with art tradesmen, there is little about provenance and one could understand a NZ news outlet seizing on the local connection and forming a view that it was Fairfax NZ rather than Fairfax Australia that was the source. But maybe there really are two lots. I couldn't find any helpful links to find out more.

One assumes, however, that what is being auctioned are copies. References to “the entire collection of vintage photographs [selling] for more than \$100,000” just add to the confusion, however.

### 2021, January 2: [Form vs function](#)

Resonating with echoes of other contestations – place vs purpose, evidence vs evocation, show vs safekeeping, access vs analysis, culture vs commercialism, etc. etc. – is the [debate](#) over development of the NSW State Library:

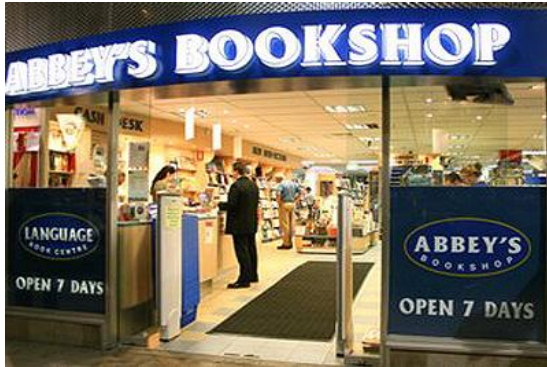
Plans to build a small bar on the roof of the heritage-listed Mitchell building at the State Library has been revived by the Berejiklian government in a bid to lure more visitors to the historic site ... \$12.3 million was set aside for Australia's oldest library, which will include a "small function venue" accessible from the Domain ... [The government faced harsh criticism](#) in early 2019 from heritage and architecture experts over plans to build a restaurant and function space over the iconic Mitchell reading room ... a development application for the small bar proposal [states] "... This proposal does not affect the heritage fabric of the building, nor interfere with the sandstone façade ... The small bar is "part of a strategy for the library to increase the engagement with the community, increase visitations to the library, stimulate the local economy and to maximise the potential of this unique, picturesque location". Plans include a \$500,000 renovation to the roof of the Mitchell building. The rooftop section was added in the 1960s and initially used as a staff cafeteria and then a staff lunch area until 2017... State Librarian John Vallance said the government's investment would see the library's "Mitchell and Macquarie St buildings accessible to all" .... A State Library spokesman said: "The funds allocated for the small bar is \$300,000 ... for the fit-out of an existing space. It [the small bar] will be run by the State Library".

Almost all of this article focuses on the building rather than the contents of the building – not on what it is for but on how it can be used for something else. The Library's muted response that their main purpose will benefit from funding that comes with a small concession to commercialisation is almost lost at the tail-end of the article. Is that increase in funding a benefit or a bribe? So far as the building is concerned, what is so wrong with a bit of roof-top commercialisation anyway? One of the things that many Wellingtonians who were not scholars or genealogists knew about NZ National Archives was that the café in the foyer served the city's best coffee. We religiously opened the “Treaty Room” on Waitangi Day (a national holiday) but hardly anyone ever came.



### 2021, March 8: Delenda est biblioteca

Sydneysiders may be interested to know that the excellent Abbey's Bookshop has remaindered [\*Books on Fire: the Destruction of Libraries throughout History\*](#) for \$15. Giving an account going back to Alexandria (and before that) up to the destruction of Iraq's libraries by the Coalition-of-the-Willing (Bush 2, Blair, and Howard) it makes for depressing reading. Other examples include the purge of Chinese writings in 3rd century BC, successive sackings of Rome, iconoclasm, the Tudor Reformation, Louvain (twice), the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Balkan cleansings in the 1990s, and many, many more. Aargghh!



Having discovered Polastron's book quite by accident while browsing this morning in Abbey's, I have now browsed about on the Internet and discovered three more titles that I will be pursuing and that others too might be interested in –

- [\*Burning the Books: A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge\*](#) by Richard Ovenden (Amazon: \$18.88) The director of the famed Bodleian Libraries at Oxford narrates the global history of the willful destruction—and surprising survival—of recorded knowledge over the past three millennia.
- [\*Burning Books and Levelling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction\*](#) by Rebecca Knuth (Amazon: \$21.99) In her previous book *Libricide*, Rebecca Knuth focused on book destruction by authoritarian regimes: Nazis, Serbs in Bosnia, Iraqis in Kuwait, Maoists during the Cultural Revolution in China, and the Chinese Communists in Tibet. But authoritarian governments are not the only perpetrators. Extremists of all stripes—through terrorism, war, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and other forms of mass violence—are also responsible for widespread cultural destruction, as she demonstrates in this new book.
- [\*Libricide: The Regime-Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century\*](#) by Rebecca Knuth (Amazon: \$13.50) Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings, declared German poet Heinrich Heine. This book identifies the regime-sponsored, ideologically driven, and systemic destruction of books and libraries in the 20th century that often served as a prelude or accompaniment to the massive human tragedies that have characterized a most violent century.

### 2021, March 9:

<<**Chris Gousmett:** There is also a marvellous story about the struggle to save the Islamic books and manuscripts of Timbuktu from the Islamists who wanted to destroy them. Charlie English. *The book smugglers of Timbuktu. The quest for this storied city and the race to save its treasures.* William Collins, 2017.>>

<<**Michael Piggott:** Perhaps worth noting that Chris' 2017 title followed a 2016 treatment of similar territory by Joshua Hammer (*The bad-ass librarians of Timbuktu*, Allen & Unwin), the former however being more historical than the latter, though both are by journalists and both drew on contemporary informants too. Their books highlight a larger point worth noting that often accompanying accounts of book



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

burning, cultural genocide etc are stories of incredible efforts at resistance and rescue. Even when archives are neglected or abandoned or threatened during conflict rather than explicitly targetted these efforts should be acknowledged. An example, introduced to me by Jeannette Bastian, is described by Kirsten Weld in her *Paper Cadavers; the archives of dictatorship in Guatemala* (Duke, 2014). Another is provided by Trudy Peterson in the current [ICA Section on Archives and Human Rights Newsletter](#)>>



### **2021, March 13: [Tune Review released](#)**

<<[Michael Piggott](#): Given the standing and role of the NAA at the centre of the Australian archival system and democratic accountability, I urge everyone to read the Tune Review report. It contains very important and relevant observations and recommendations. And also to think upon the timing of its release (forced by an FOI application?), over 13 months after it was handed to the Attorney-General and the Archives, the credit for which is now claimed by both [The Guardian](#) and Senator Patrick (in today's [Canberra Times](#)).>>

### **2021, March 25:**

Apart from despair over the silence on NAA's neglected national and leadership role under its Act, I had a quiet chuckle over that part of the [Tune Report](#) dealing with the definition of "record" (section 7.2) -

To keep pace with technological developments and seize opportunities for efficiencies across government, the most notable deficiencies in the current Act are:

- The definition of a 'record' in the Act – 'a document, or object' that contains information – does not have practical application in the era of cloud computing, where it is impossible to identify the object that contains the information.
- Owing to its pre-digital origins, the Act does not foresee that a record can be archived while it is still in active use by the creating agency. This leads to delays of several years before the transfer of digital records, increasing the risk of loss through neglect and technological obsolescence
- The definition of a Commonwealth record is limited to a record that is the property of the Commonwealth. This definition is unreliable in an age of third party, non-Commonwealth digital platforms and telecommunications providers. Similarly, where private contractors increasingly deliver government services, a stronger definition is required as to what records serve as evidence of Australian Government actions.

Good luck with that. If they can get around the constitutional difficulty and dump the dreaded property test, well and good. Otherwise .....

All archives laws operate at the intersection of ambit (whose actions are regulated by the law's provisions) and interpretation (what constitutes a record and hence what is a government record to which such regulation applies). The claim that archives laws uphold





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

accountability is threadbare because we have seen over the years that, when there are political egos or skin in the game, there is scant enforcement and the words of the statute count for little. No drafting is proof against quibbles over meaning or legal loopholes. Three recent cases about whether or not documents created by the Executive are government records illustrate the point:

- The [Hocking Case](#) where the High Court had to decide that they were.
- The [Annastacia Palaszczuk Case](#) where the Queensland Solicitor-General decided they were not (mostly).
- The [Gladys Berejiklian Case](#) where it was decided (apparently) that it doesn't much matter one way or the other.

In cases such as the Queensland emails, a Premier truly devoted to democratic accountability would have reacted to the advice she received by concluding there was a defect in the Act which needed fixing – not by breathing a sigh of relief at escaping scrutiny. But that is not how things work in a climate of the 24-hour news cycle, political spin, and the nightly diet of gotcha moments.

Tune mentions coverage of ministers and their offices in passing (section 2.6) but doesn't, so far as I can see, grapple with grey areas (e.g. advisers, consultants, "private" emails).

You don't start with an evaluation of the existing definitions but with an analysis of what we want to achieve. Who and what do we want covered? Then, so far as possible, you draft it into lawyer-proof language. But, when political interest or reputations are at stake, there will always be a way around the drafting, however robust it is. After thinking about it for nearly 50 years, I have concluded that we need more than statutory language, more than a black-letter definition fixed in stone for lawyers to get their teeth into (strange mixed metaphor, that).

In addition to a statutory definition, we need a mechanism to adjust the interpretation part of the intersection to meet changing and unforeseen circumstances. This would be a power, for example, to expand and alter the definition as cases demonstrated that it was not working as intended. The updated interpretation could not, of course, operate retrospectively to make unlawful actions that had already occurred, only prospectively to prevent them happening again. But doubts about records already in existence might be resolved (subject to the usual qualifications re property and other entitlements).

It could not be a tool for making new law but something employed unilaterally [for the avoidance of doubt](#) in relation to future actions by servants of the Crown. There would be a countervailing fairness argument vs the over-riding public interest claim. The lawyers wouldn't like the "uncertainty" and I have some doubts myself that the archives authorities would be capable of making effective use of such a device in view of the way they mucked up the NAP (a similar adjustment mechanism that they failed to use properly). But it may be worth thinking about.

**PS** The second dot point in the quote from Tune is quite wrong. The access provisions, for example, apply regardless of whether the records are "active" or with Archives. If there is a flaw, it is that the Act doesn't deal adequately with the option of leaving "inactive" records with agencies.

**PPS** I cannot forebear from noting that it is advice from the current Queensland Solicitor-General upon which the Qld Premier now relies and that it was advice from a former Queensland Crown Solicitor that fired the starting gun in the Heiner Affair.

**2021, March 6:**

**<<Michael Piggott: The Tune review report presents yet another example of the limits of rules written and promulgated to shape individual and corporate behaviour -**





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

including craven, self-interested behaviour, a hard reality acknowledged indirectly by Chris in the following:

- -"Good luck with that."
- -"when there are political egos or skin in the game, there is scant enforcement and the words of the statute count for little..."
- -"when political interest or reputations are at stake, there will always be..."
- -"I have some doubts myself that the archives authorities would be capable of making effective use of such a device.."
- -"a Premier truly devoted to democratic accountability would have reacted to ..."

Beyond deft legal drafting, could an additional mechanism be worth thinking about? Probably. We do indeed need more than statutory language, more than a black-letter definition fixed in stone. Adequate funding for a start, plus well training professional staff and good public understanding of archives beyond resources for family history. But until we also acknowledge the relevance of personal and corporate qualities as influencers of behaviour and outcomes, we're looking at only a partial framework. Long ago the disciplines of economics and geography added human and cultural factors into their research and theories; archival science is still ...?.

Tuesday last's *The Briefing*, commented on one of the latest shenanigans in Parliament House:

Prime Minister Scott Morrison criticises staffers, one of whom was subsequently fired, for performing lewd sex acts on camera, including on the desk of a female MP. In recording the acts, they defied Parliament House's golden rule: destroy all the evidence

Which raises the question why create evidence of misdeeds in the first place? [And "Because they didn't think they'd get caught" barely begins to provide answers.] Another example from the millions available: why did Ian Brady and Myra Hindley create an audio tape of their crimes? Which just leaves the theoretical and situational question: why do people create records, and its opposite, why do they not, when rules/mechanisms/duty/culture/logic/SOP etc suggests they will or should or must? Anyone know the answer? Does David John Tune, AO PSM the wily old ex-government official and the Morrison government reviewer *du jour*?>>



### **2022, June 9: So it goes : ABC abolishes librarians and archivists**

Archivists and librarians at the ABC are in shock after management unveiled plans to abolish 58 positions and make journalists research and archive their own stories. Reporters and producers working on breaking news, news programs and daily programs like 7.30 will have to search for archival material themselves and will be expected to log the metadata of any new material into the system ...

Reporting in *The Australian* is that the 58 will be replaced by 30 new jobs. If they were spinning it, this could be represented as a restructure rather than a massacre. Interestingly,



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

I haven't been able to find any of this on the ABC's own news site – something for Media Watch to look into, perhaps.

... ABC management said the broadcaster was transforming into a digital-first media organisation and new technology had enabled more efficient content collection and management. "This means some roles are no longer required but also provides opportunities to develop new skills and create new and evolved roles," the ABC said in a statement on Wednesday. "The ABC is proposing to remove approximately 58 roles and introduce 30 new roles...Approximately 90 per cent of ABC audio and 35 per cent of its videotape collection was converted into digital files last year ...

.....  
Sound libraries will no longer add new commercial music releases to the music bank and producers must access music for programs themselves...

A further four positions will be made redundant in TV post-production as the roles are being replaced with automatic services. The proposal for post-production says that manual quality checking of a program by ABC specialists "to ensure it meets ABC broadcast standards" will now be automated...

The ABC said the redundancies came about as a part of the broadcaster's transition to digital and on-demand services, and to improve workflow and efficiency... "In 2021, approximately 90% of our audio and 35% of our video tape collection was converted into digital files. More than two million content assets are now available to content makers at their desktops via the ABC's Content Digital Archive (CoDA)."

The ABC is proposing to introduce 30 new roles, including "content navigators" who will work in newsrooms to assist journalists with using the digitised ABC archives. The gutting of the archive staff follows the [dismantling of the ABC's historic sound and reference](#) libraries in 2018...

### 2022, June 10: ABC axing jobs

<<**Joanna Sassoon: Here is a [short article](#) about the axing of archivist and librarian jobs at the ABC. More than two million content assets are now available to content makers at their desktops via the ABC's Content Digital Archive (CoDA). The ABC is proposing to introduce 30 new roles, including "content navigators" who will work in newsrooms to assist journalists with using the digitised ABC archives.**>>

I know nothing of the design and functionality of CoDA but I'm guessing that it is in its essentials the same as IT's approach to recordkeeping. And we all know how that turned out. It's about liberating "users" and not constraining them (ubiquity vs structure). Who knows whether or not the job description for content navigators picks up the superseded roles of archivists and librarians outlined in the article Joanna has called to our attention but, in a digital environment, a need for assistance to make systems work would be regarded as a hallmark of poor design.

We should not pine too much for a continuing role as gatekeepers. For thirty years, it has been apparent that digital systems would, for better or worse, replace the need for our "assistance" and we haven't prepared for it very well. The mania for digitisation of content, all very well in its way, does nothing to make the transition needed in methods (as Bearman urged us to do so many years ago). Valiant efforts to develop metadata schema, functional requirements, and standards were helpful up to a point but they are only mechanical – not much use without the will and the skills to make them work effectively.

Of course, I don't have THE answer in relation to designing digital recordkeeping (including digital archiving) except to say that no one person could (or should) be expected to and that we haven't made as much progress as maybe we should have. An heroic, continuing, collaborative effort is needed but whether or not the fruits of such an effort would be adopted



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

in the big bad world is very much open to doubt. We know a lot more now about “user” behaviour and our systems need to adapt to that (but not necessarily surrender wholly to it). Users will do what they want to do, not what we want them to do. We can learn from Google, Wikipedia, etc. about how to prompt, entice, and fool “users” into following correct pathways and to accept (if not to understand) structure. And there are those amongst us who welcome “user” freedom as a liberating pathway to enlightenment (ubiquity). As I have said [elsewhere](#), there need be no conflict between them. But there is, alas.

I said recently [on the List](#) that facts without understanding are worthless. We are in the understanding business and if our role and function were to perish altogether, it has always been my melancholy belief that the human instinct for understanding would persist and reassert itself in ways we cannot yet imagine. Melancholy maybe but also hopeful, I guess.

### **2022, July 19: [Broadcast archives](#)**

<<[Joanna Sassoon: While the ABC celebrates its centenary by \*\*sacking\*\* those looking after the archives in favour of ‘content navigators’ \[t\]he BBC is celebrating its centenary by \*\*opening\*\* its archives to the world](#)>>

### **2024, June 5:**

Earlier reports of the death (or near-death) of ABC Archives – see also posting of [10 June 2022](#) - may have been premature. The [site](#) for ABC Archives now promotes itself alternatively as a cultural treasure-trove or as a commercial venture -

We collect and preserve the ABC Radio and Television recordings that have documented the cultural life of Australians since the first Radio broadcast in 1932. Our archives provide an audiovisual history of Australian news, current affairs, documentaries, entertainment, education and sport as broadcast by the ABC. Our collections include audio, moving image, stills and more.

Further on, we learn how the public may make use of this taxpayer-funded resource:

The ABC has released a selection of its archive materials for use by the public. These materials are being made available online directly from the ABC as well as from a number of cultural partners as specified below. Each work you access, including any photograph, audio recording or audiovisual item, will be tagged with particular licence conditions ...

And [still further on](#) how in-person access is afforded (as distinct from online access)

#### **WHAT MATERIAL IS HELD IN THE ABC ARCHIVE?**

We hold selections of:

- ABC Radio material from 1932
- ABC Television material from 1956
- ABC Photographs
- ABC Documents

#### **CAN I VISIT THE ABC ARCHIVES TO DO RESEARCH?**

Yes - but only if you are a bona fide post-graduate student, or a commercial researcher or independent program maker working on a book or production. Research facilities are available in Sydney and Melbourne. You can access in-house databases and auditioning facilities. There is a daily fee of \$120 to cover facility costs plus our standard fees if you need specific research assistance from specialised ABC personnel.

Many of our older records, including audio-visual items as well as corporate documents and publications, are available for viewing at the National Archives of Australia in their reading rooms. You can find their contact details, how to request information, and their opening hours at: <http://www.naa.gov.au/about-us/contact/>.

Clearly, some of the selections held are in the Open Access Period. The idea that, apart from statutory exceptions and exemptions, only a "selection" of C'wealth records in the Open Access period might be made available is surprising as is the thought that such records are



made available by let of the ABC ("ABC has released a selection") rather than by law. Got me wondering.

### 1.0 Background

The basic rule under the *Archives Act* is (or was when drafted) that all Commonwealth records in the open access period (subject to stipulated exemptions and exceptions) are available for public inspection w/o charge. This is regardless of whether or not they are in NAA's possession and, if out of NAA's possession, it is NAA's responsibility in any case to make it happen irrespective of any agency's objections or intentions to the contrary. The Act was to permit long-lived agencies (such as the ABC) to retain records and administer access to them in accordance with the Act and, under NAA's supervision, in the "forms of access" outlined in the Act – [s.36](#). There were active discussions with the ABC (et al) during drafting about how all this would work.

**NB.** Significant [modifications](#) to the forms of access were made in 2018 to "facilitate more efficient and equitable access to records for all applicants".

### 2.0 Commonwealth records in audio-visual format

Basically, in our innocence, we made little or no special arrangement about formats, licencing, commercial exploitation etc. and the idea of online access was not even considered back in the 1970s. There is provision for payment of fees in s.36 but only for the recovery of costs associated with delivery from "machine-readable records" (as we quaintly referred to them long ago) or from records requiring transcription. I can say that the commercial exploitation of C'wealth records was not in the spirit of the drafting back then. Insofar as the issue came up, it was considered that agencies could make commercial use of materials they controlled but copyright was their only protection against commercial competition. Special provision for copyright control and for ABC and SBS material in particular are set out in s.36(4) and s.36(5).

**NB.** Regardless of possession, Commonwealth records in general are "controlled" still by the creating agency or its functional successor within the constraints imposed on them by the Act, especially over records in the open access period.

### 3.0 Are there now two access regimes applying to the same material?

The site says "many of our older records, including audio-visual items as well as corporate documents and publications, are available for viewing at the National Archives of Australia" – presumably in accordance with the provisions of s.36. But the arrangements set out for access on ABC premisses seem different as do conditions imposed on the use of the C'wealth records held by the ABC. In particular, there is the provision that the ABC Archives can be visited "only if you are a bona fide post-graduate student, or a commercial researcher or independent program maker working on a book or production". There's that pesky phrase *bona fide* again - cf. [What a difference a word makes](#) for 20 April, 2024

I long ago put aside any feeling that it was part of my job to discriminate for or against. I reached that conclusion when I decided I couldn't any longer subscribe to the granting of access governed by the concept of *bona fide research*. No one could ever satisfactorily explain to me what that phrase meant. They wanted to make it the basis for "special access" – s.56(2) – in drafting the [Archives Act](#), but it wouldn't wash.

On a related point, does online access (afforded by the ABC or anyone else, including NAA) supersede s.36 or is it merely a boutique enhancement?

**2024, June 19:**

Here's one I didn't know about in the news and media space –

The [Guardian News and Media Archive](#)





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

“collects and preserves original and unique documents and objects that tell the story of the Guardian and Observer, and can be visited by appointment.” It may cover the period from 1821 in which the great [Manchester Guardian](#) operated – as Malcolm Muggeridge once ruefully remarked, “now reduced to *The Guardian* merely” – but I could find little evidence of that.

The online [Catalogue](#) looks (at first glance) to be a reasonably good example of online descriptive practice (such as it is). I liked their useful advice –

The level of detail of catalogue entries will vary - sometimes a series of thousands of photographs may have just one entry, sometimes individual photographs will be described. You will also see where the document fits into its collection. Clicking on the reference number (RefNo) displays a diagram of the whole collection of which the document is a part, similar to a family tree. The online archive contains descriptions of corporate records of the Guardian and Observer, details of oral history recordings, lists of photographic files available in our picture library archive, and details of personal collections of papers and photographic material of individuals associated with the papers. Overviews of these records are available on our [website](#).

A basic idea that I suspect many users of archival “collections” fail to grasp at first.

I used the search tool to look for “Empire Marketing Board” and “Crown Film Unit”, my go-to samples from my time studying at UCL in the 1970s. No results for EMB and the only results for CFU were non-specific hits in a 36-box accumulation of images (“Prints from the Observer picture library on subjects beginning with C”):

### **OBS - Records of The Observer newspaper**

#### **6 - Editorial records**

#### **9 - Picture Desk records**

#### **2 - Observer Picture Library print files**

#### **1 - Picture Library general subject files**

Box 5 Cars: Vehicle Removal Unit: Vauxhall  
Box 9 Cinema: Observer Film Exhibition: Stars of The British Screen  
Box 9 Cinema: Russian Film Makers in London  
Box 10 Competitions: National Mock Trials: Southwark Crown Court  
Box 22 Countries: England: London: Crown Reach (+3 oversize)  
etc, etc, etc.

The catalogue does not contain published articles from the Guardian or Observer. These can be accessed online on the [Guardian and Observer Digital Archive](#)

## **2025, February 8: Knowing how we stand**

### **Trump fires the Archivist of the United States**

According to Paul Newman, being on Nixon’s Enemies List was the [highest single honour](#) he’d ever received.

The National Archives played a key role in the criminal case against Trump, alerting the Justice Department in 2022 that Trump had [potentially mishandled classified documents](#) after the president failed to return records that the agency had requested, something presidents are required to do after departing office ... Trump eventually returned some of the records but kept others, and investigators said they obtained security video in July 2022 showing Trump’s aides moving boxes of classified documents. The FBI later opened a criminal investigation into Trump, searching his Mar-a-Lago residence and finding 11 additional sets of documents ... The Trump-appointed federal judge Aileen Cannon [dismissed](#) the case last year, arguing the DOJ’s special counsel Jack Smith had been unconstitutionally appointed. Smith appealed the dismissal but wound down the case following Trump’s election last year due to the Justice Department’s longstanding practice not to prosecute sitting presidents. [NBC](#)



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

[Coleen] Shogan, 49, was not the archivist at the time the agency was attempting to retrieve boxes of presidential records from Trump's estate in 2021 and 2022. But Trump has viewed NARA with suspicion since the investigation and has openly described its top staff as complicit in efforts to damage him politically ... The Archives' handling of presidential records, and the complex set of laws that govern them, became a central focus of the criminal case against Trump that played out in a South Florida federal courthouse for nearly two years before Trump's return to power. [Politico](#)

### **2025, February 9:**

**<<Mark Brogan: Widely reported as an act of revenge, the dismissal is also consistent with activation of a strategy for lasting memory management. Most dictators get around to this sooner or later.>>**



**Colleen Shogan** · 2nd

11th Archivist of the United States - This is my personal account and network...  
15h · 🌐

This evening, President Trump fired me. No cause or reason was cited. It has been an honor serving as the 11th Archivist of the United States. I have zero regrets - I absolutely did my best every day for the National Archives and the American people.



### **2025, February 10:**

"Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."  
(Orwell)

### **2025, February 12:**

**<<Heather Soyka: It was reported last night by [Rolling Stone](#) that there is a forthcoming purge list for the National Archives.**

"Trump said the list was to include, but not be limited to, Archives officials involved with the effort to get the Biden-era Justice Department to help recover classified material Trump hoarded at [Mar-a-Lago](#) after he left office the first time. Trump's stubborn refusal to simply turn over all of the highly sensitive government documents led to the FBI raid of his Florida estate, and then to criminal charges in Special Counsel Jack Smith's investigation (which were rendered moot by Trump's return to office).

The list, which Trump administration officials vetted, includes Archives staffers who were directly involved with the records standoff with the then-former president, as well as some who weren't, the sources add. There are some in Trump's ear who want him to oust everybody on the list. There are others close to Trump, including some senior White House staff, who think the final list of Archives staff to dismiss should be more carefully curated, as there are some names on the initial list who they feel were just doing their jobs and not worthy of blackballing.

The potential purge list includes Deputy Archivist of the United States William Bosanko, though it is unclear if he'll meet the same fate as now-former Archivist of the United States Colleen Shogan, whom Trump dismissed on Friday. There are questions within the administration about whether Trump firing Bosanko would be legal. However, it is the position of the upper crust of the second Trump administration that the law — and the Constitution — should not get in the way of what the president, and his purge-buddy Elon Musk, want to do.

In response to a request for comment, a National Archives official sent [Rolling Stone](#) a letter the American Historical Association sent the White House in response to Shogan's dismissal last week. The letter notes that Shogan serves in a nonpartisan, Senate-confirmed role, and that the law requires the president to communicate to Congress why he



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

is dismissing her. "Democracy rests on the rule of law. And the history of the United States rests on unfettered access to the archival record," the letter concludes.">>

**2025, February 21:**

### **<<a strategy for lasting memory management>>**

... NARA does more than just collect, digitize, and maintain government records. As an independent agency within the executive branch, it's responsible for, among other things, [administering](#) the Electoral College process by providing the official instructions for how the states transmit electors' votes to Congress; [overseeing](#) the process of ratifying new Constitutional amendments; [managing](#) the document classification system and, in turn, the delicate balance between public transparency and national security; and [publicizing](#) the Code of Federal Regulations and the Federal Register, the two documents that codify rules and chronicle the daily goings-on, respectively, of the federal government ... the Archivist of the United States and NARA are the maintainers of the system's foundational codebase of legal and historical documents.

... NARA's critical role in controlling the official documents that are the lifeblood of American governance requires that the agency remain a neutral steward of the government's entire legal and regulatory regime ... A partisan archivist could lead to biased (or outright malicious) decision-making when it comes to document access, preservation, and release; delay or block access to records in compliance with the President Records Act to protect political interests; or even, at the very worst, facilitate meddling with the Electoral College or federal regulations in the service of maintaining power. It's not so hard, in this context, to imagine a world where someone deliberately destroys official records in order to obstruct an investigation into potentially illegal government activities. And which recent president has [tried to interfere with the Electoral College, destroy documents, and wipe out government regulations wholesale](#)?

All of these factors not only create a precedent for future political exploitation by subsequent administrations, but threaten to undermine the U.S. government's historical integrity and democratic accountability. Bureaucracies maintain their institutional legitimacy by consistently applying rules, regulations, and procedures, and injecting potential political malfeasance into the organization tasked with maintaining those rules means corrupting the very mechanisms that define the shape and scope of American governance ... [Jared Keller](#)

One week after President Trump [fired](#) the head of the National Archives and Records Administration, the second-in-command, the deputy archivist, has informed colleagues of his intent to retire ... William "Jay" Bosanko served as chief operating officer for the National Archives when the FBI served a search warrant on Mar-a-Lago in August 2022 in order to seize boxes of Trump records ... Bosanko also held the same position when [it was revealed](#) in January 2023 that classified documents were found at the Delaware home of then-President Joe Biden ... Bosanko has worked for the National Archives since 1993, and has served as deputy archivist since December 2023. In that role, he runs the day-to-day operations of the agency.

*"When an individual controls the records, they control the story," [Bosanko said](#) in an interview with "60 Minutes" last September. "They control what the American people can know or not know about their presidency." He also reflected on what he believes is lost when presidential records are not transferred at the end of an administration. "That strikes at the very heart of the historical record, the completeness of it, the ability to understand decisions," Bosanko said. "And so it's important for historians, and ultimately the American people to understand all of the pieces that came in and [made up that decision making.](#)" [CBS News February 15, 2025](#)*

President Donald J. Trump has announced that Jim Byron will serve as Senior Advisor to Acting Archivist, United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio, at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). Byron, who has led the Nixon Foundation as President and CEO since 2021, will take a leave of absence while the Trump administration conducts its search for a full-time Archivist of the United States ... The Richard Nixon



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Foundation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that owns and co-operates the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum campus with the National Archives. The Nixon Foundation encourages and supports scholarship, sponsors programs that engage the public with American history and civics, creates and displays special exhibits, and convenes forums for discussion and debate about America's 37th president. [Richard Nixon Foundation](#)

**<<Bureaucracies maintain their institutional legitimacy by consistently applying rules, regulations, and procedures>>**

### **Kaiser Wilhelm II**

Wilhelm was insecure, unstable, impatient, and lacked focus and direction. He was arrogant and obnoxious ... [and] prone to imperialist rhetoric ... He regularly made diplomatic faux pas ...

Sound like anyone we know?

[Tony Abbott](#) has launched a stinging critique of Donald Trump over his [misinformation-riddled comments about Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy](#) and apparent intention to favour Russia in negotiations to end the three-year war. Abbott, an outspoken supporter of Trump, said the US president was "living in fantasy land" for blaming the [Russian invasion of Ukraine](#) on Zelenskyy ... Asked about Trump's comments at a press conference today, current Prime Minister Anthony Albanese – whose government is trying to negotiate exemptions imposed by the notoriously transactional president – reiterated Australia's support for Kyiv without criticising the US president ... Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, though, said Trump had "got it wrong" in his stance on Zelenskyy. "*The thought that President Zelenskyy or the Ukrainian people started this battle, or somehow they were responsible for the war, is just wrong,*" he told 2GB. [9 News](#) February 20, 2025

**<< insecure, unstable, impatient, and lacked focus and direction>>**

Perhaps not. Instead of having to live in a world destabilised by caprice, some find comfort in the idea that there is a design for chaos. It may be comforting for us (in a way) to reflect that, if there is an ambition to “replace the ... rule of law with the law of the jungle”, r/keepers are seen as an obstacle to that ambition (the ‘highest single honour’ we’ll ever receive).



*“When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.”* [Edmund Burke](#)

On February 4, 2025, President Donald Trump signed a sweeping [executive order](#) with the potential to upend decades of American global engagement. The directive mandates a comprehensive review within 180 days of all current multilateral organizations of which the United States is a member and all international treaties to which it is party. The explicit purpose of this exercise is to determine whether such support should be withdrawn. The clock is thus ticking on a distinctive and momentous aspect of post-1945 American internationalism: the strategic decision by successive Republican and Democratic administrations to embed U.S. power in multilateral institutions designed to support a peaceful, prosperous, and just world and to facilitate cooperation on shared global problems. The immediate targets are narrow and unsurprising. The order [declares](#) that the





## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

United States will [withdraw](#) from the UN Human Rights Council, as it did during Trump's first term; reconsider membership in UNESCO, a long-standing target of Republicans; and cease all funding for the UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees ... This is only the beginning. Countless other international treaties and organizations could be on the chopping block—or in the [wood chipper](#), if you will. It is even plausible that the Trump administration will conclude that an “[America First](#)” foreign policy requires pulling the United States out of the UN—and kicking the UN out of the United States ...

Among legal scholars, there is considerable [debate](#) and [ambiguity](#) over whether the president actually possesses the constitutional authority to leave the UN (which has no formal withdrawal provisions), much less to unilaterally abrogate thousands of treaties (particularly in the absence of a specific termination clause in the relevant instruments of ratification). That is cold comfort. As Trump's first weeks in office have shown, this White House doesn't do ambiguity—and there are many ways to [wreck institutions](#) without formally leaving them.

It is easy to take for granted America's long-standing participation in multilateral organizations, alliances, and treaties—or to assume the nation has had no alternative. In fact, there was nothing inevitable about this particular U.S. approach to world order. Viewed in the light of history, the post-1945 decision by the world's most powerful nation to champion and defend an open, rule-bound international order grounded in multilateral institutions was both anomalous and a choice of monumental importance ... little in America's experience between 1776 and 1945 suggested it would become the guarantor of an open world order ... That seemed poised to change under president Woodrow Wilson, who championed the League of Nations as a basis for international order after World War I. This episode proved a [false dawn](#). The U.S. Senate ultimately rejected league membership and America retreated to a policy of detachment, failing to help stabilize a deteriorating global security and economic order in the 1920s and 1930s.

It was left to Franklin D. Roosevelt to complete the deal. On the heels of the Great Depression and in the midst of history's most destructive war, his administration drafted blueprints for an [open postwar world order](#) based on [Atlantic Charter](#) principles, one realized during negotiations at [Dumbarton Oaks](#) and [Bretton Woods](#). The U.S. scheme had [three pillars](#). The United Nations ... A multilateral system of trade and payments, governed by international financial institutions and new trade rules ... Finally, political self-determination would replace the era of empires with independent, self-governing, and ideally democratic nations. To be sure, the post-World War II order that emerged diverged significantly from this blueprint ... [but] the contours of the U.S. multilateral world order vision persisted, and, with the end of the bipolar conflict, provided an institutional framework for deepening global cooperation.

This is the world that Donald Trump seeks to destroy. His ambition is to replace the international rule of law with the law of the jungle ... he envisions a regionalized [world] in which powerful nations pursue [spheres of influence](#) and throw their weight around ... In this purely transactional vision, substantive multilateralism yields to bullying bilateralism ... every interaction is an opportunity for one-sided bargaining to improve America's relative position against all others ... Trump's America First policies will accelerate the fragmentation of a tottering world order already beset by centrifugal forces—rising geopolitical competition, surging populist nationalism, stalled development, destabilizing technologies, and a deepening climate emergency. Well before Trump's election, UN Secretary-General António Guterres [lamented](#) a multilateral system “gridlocked in colossal global dysfunction.” ...

This “stop-the-world-I-want-to-get-off” mindset is based on the fantastical assumption that the United States can replicate the capacities of multilateral organizations and the global public goods they provide through its own efforts or new, ad hoc arrangements ... In the end, the Trump administration's critique of multilateralism boils down to three main complaints: international organizations and treaties infringe on American sovereignty, unduly restrict U.S. freedom of action, and simply cost too much ... “A cynic,” one of playwright Oscar Wilde's characters [observes](#), is “a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.” In his accelerating efforts to dismantle the multilateral system, Donald Trump certainly fits that description ... there is nothing inherently wrong with periodically reviewing U.S. global commitments. But any such process should be done



thoughtfully and judiciously, and in close consultation with Congress. Little in the Trump administration's early flurry of norm- and institution-busting suggests this will be its modus operandi.

[Stewart Patrick](#) February 19, 2025

### 2025, March 4:

<<Instead of having to live in a world destabilised by caprice,  
some find comfort in the idea that there is a design for chaos.>>

*"When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."* [Edmund Burke](#)

You can find that quote on a **Good Reads** page which lists numerous others, many of them so strong-minded and apposite to our own time that I can almost believe them to be timeless (almost, not quite): I rather like: *"People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors."* and *"There is no safety for honest men except by believing all possible evil of evil men."*

Christopher Hitchens wrote a great essay on Burke in [The Atlantic](#) - still available online if you sign in.

- *"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."*
- *"Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."*
- *"Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting."*
- *"Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little."*
- *"Rudeness is the weak man's imitation of strength."*
- *"Well is it known that ambition can creep as well as soar."*
- *"But what is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint. Those who know what virtuous liberty is, cannot bear to see it disgraced by incapable heads, on account of their having high-sounding words in their mouths."*
- *"Our patience will achieve more than our force."*
- *"Never apologise for showing feeling. When you do so, you apologise for the truth."*
- *"It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters."*
- *"Whoever undertakes to set himself up as a judge of Truth and Knowledge is shipwrecked by the laughter of the gods."*
- *"Liberty does not exist in the absence of morality."*
- *"No power so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear."*
- *"Never despair, but if you do, work on in despair."*
- *"He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper."*
- *"Among a people generally corrupt, liberty cannot long exist."*
- *"It is a general popular error to imagine the loudest complainers for the public to be the most anxious for its welfare."*
- *"If we command our wealth, we shall be rich and free. If our wealth commands us, we are poor indeed."*
- *"There is no safety for honest men except by believing all possible evil of evil men."*
- *"Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites, — in proportion as their love to justice is*



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

*above their rapacity,—in proportion as their soundness and sobriety of understanding is above their vanity and presumption,—in proportion as they are more disposed to listen to the counsels of the wise and good, in preference to the flattery of knaves. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”*

- “Nothing turns out to be so oppressive and unjust as a feeble government.”
- “It is not, what a lawyer tells me I may do; but what humanity, reason, and justice, tell me I ought to do.”

**2025, March 17:**

**<<9 Feb., 2025: Mark Brogan - ... consistent with activation of a strategy for lasting memory management. Most dictators get around to this sooner or later.>>**

**<<1 Feb., 2025: What a Difference a Word Makes: Nice! Dealing with "misinformation" within a r/keeping framework. Only in America (thank God). - On Thursday, the Trump administration ordered the US agriculture department to unpublish its websites documenting or referencing the climate crisis.>>**

### **Trump moves to close down Voice of America**

US President Donald Trump has signed an order to strip back the federally-funded news organisation Voice of America, accusing it of being "anti-Trump" and "radical" ... VOA, still primarily a radio service, was set up during World War Two to counter Nazi propaganda. It is used by hundreds of millions of people around the world ...

The president's order targets VOA's parent company US Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which also funds non-profit entities such as Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia, which were originally set up to counter communism ... The National Press Club, a leading representative group for US journalists, said the order "undermines America's long-standing commitment to a free and independent press" ...

VOA and other stations under USAGM serve more than 400,000,000 listeners and are broadly equivalent to the BBC World Service, which is part-funded by the British government. The Czech Foreign Minister intends to push the European Union to support keeping Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty running in Prague. Jan Lipavský said he plans to ask European foreign ministers at a meeting on Monday to find ways to at least partially maintain the broadcaster's operations ...

The US president also cut funding to several other federal agencies - including those responsible for preventing homelessness, and funding museums and libraries ...

**BBC 17 March, 2025**

**2025, March 17: Fwd [Arcan-I] Defunding IMLS**

**<<From: Mary Kosta <mko...@uwo.ca> ... President Trump signed an executive order to defund the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The IMLS provides critical funding for libraries, museums, and archives in the USA. This may cause libraries, museums, and archives to close or be unable to deliver many programs across the country. I personally attended an IMLS funded program, Digital POWRR, some years ago, and it empowered me to be able to set up a digital preservation workflow in the archives. The IMLS funds so much - tribal libraries, state libraries, Internet in libraries, interlibrary loan programs, and was an early funder of Omeka, among countless good works. Archivists in the USA and Canada have relied on IMLS funded programs. Here is the executive order ... You can sign a petition from Every**



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**Library no matter where you live. Please act to save libraries, museums, and archives in the USA.>>**

**2025, March 21:**

The [Conversation](#) has a piece by Devon Akman (Director of the MSU Museum and CoLab Studio, Michigan State University) on this:

*Congress created the IMLS in 1996 through [the Museum and Library Services Act](#). The law merged the Institute of Museum Services, which was established in 1976, with the Library Programs Office of the Department of Education. By combining these two departments, Congress sought to create an overarching agency that could more cohesively and strategically support American museums and libraries. The agency's mission, programs and funding have been reaffirmed through subsequent legislation, such as [the Museum and Library Services Act of 2003](#).*

The agency provides financial support to a wide array of cultural and educational institutions, including art, science and history museums, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens and historic sites. Libraries of all types – public, academic, school and research – also benefit from the agency's funding ...

### **Defunding comes close to home**

#### **Australian university researchers told 'woke gender ideology' among reasons behind Trump funding cuts**

The Trump administration told Australian university researchers a push to promote administration priorities and avoid "DEI, woke gender ideology and the green new deal" was behind a "temporary pause" of funding, according to a memo seen by Guardian Australia ... A memo sent to an Australian university project on 27 January on behalf of the US office of management and budget notifying a "temporary pause" of agency funding said the executive branch had a "duty to align federal spending and action with the will of the American people".

"Financial assistance should be dedicated to advancing Administration priorities, focusing taxpayer dollars to advance a stronger and safer America, eliminating the financial burden of inflation for citizens, unleashing American energy and manufacturing, ending 'wokeness' and the weaponization of government, promoting efficiency in government, and Making America Healthy Again," the memo said. "The use of Federal resources to advance Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies is a waste of taxpayer dollars that does not improve the day-to-day lives of those we serve." ...

The Universities Australia CEO, Luke Sheehy, told ABC Canberra Drive on Wednesday ... "Our greatest research partner in the US is looking like it's becoming unreliable," he said. "This is an important and alarming development ... we want to make sure that the Australian government provides us a pathway and some clarity on what we should do next." ... Sheehy urged the government to join [Horizon Europe](#), which he described as one of the "biggest sources of funding for research on the planet", as the US became increasingly unreliable ...

The Group of Eight CEO, Vicki Thomson, wrote to the industry minister, Ed Husic, this week on behalf of its member universities and the European Australian Business Council (EABC) CEO, Jason Collins, urging Australia to associate with Horizon Europe ... Thomson, also the EABC deputy chair, has consistently lobbied the government to join Horizon Europe since 2020 ... The Australian Academy of Science president, Prof Chennupati Jagadish AC, urged the government to give "serious and urgent attention" to American authorities' actions or risk being "dangerously unprepared" for the consequences ... "The consequences of inaction are profound," he said ...





**2025, March 22:**

**<<the executive branch had a “duty to align federal spending and action with the will of the American people”>>**

One assumes that Trump’s defunding juggernaut would not impact on [defence industry donations](#) to the Australian War Memorial. Leidos, [partnered](#) with Lockheed Martin Australia, is [listed](#) as a major AWM “corporate partner”. [Lockheed Martin Australia](#) is “a wholly-owned subsidiary of Lockheed Martin Corporation”. Through contracts between US Defence and Lockheed, American taxpayers are therefore supporting that company’s work, including any charitable donations Lockheed Martin or (possibly) its wholly-owned Australian subsidiary makes and to research its commissions.

Difficult to see, though, how any interdiction on American taxpayer support for unworthy causes could be linked to Leidos donations to AWM through “[disguised distributions](#)”. In any case, perhaps Trump would not regard the work of AWM as dissonant with the will of the American people.



[Leidos](#)

[Kim Beazley](#)

[On Closer Inspection](#)



**2018, January 8: [Archives without archives](#)**

**An [interesting concept](#) :**

... for a long time, scholars and archival activists in South Africa lamented about archives repositories that are characterised by low usage, lack of skills, infrastructure and recognition by authorities ... The western way of understanding the archives continued to be given more space to develop in South Africa, while the indigenous way is not given even a sliver of attention ... “As things stand, the only archives of any note in South Africa are those of the various former colonies, the Boer republics and, after 1910, the Union Government of South Africa. Just like in Australia, the public domain has not been accommodating to indigenous models of knowledge production ... archival holdings in South African archives repositories do not reflect the diversity of the nation but mostly the interests of those who were previously in power. As a result, the users of such archives are mostly the beneficiaries of apartheid and colonial governments.”

... One way of redressing this imbalance, he said, is through restructuring services at a local level closer to the people. “In South Africa, opportunity to transform the archival system has been presented in the past, but missed and continues to be missed by the archival communities. As a result, transformation is curtailed to skin colour by hiring more and more black people in the archives arena instead of transforming archival holdings and access ... public archives in South Africa have been unable to transform themselves into active documenters of society and thereby fail to fulfil their mandate of collecting non-public records with enduring value of national significance and to document aspects of the nation’s experience neglected by archives repositories in the past. “This mandate positions archives to play an important role in redress, transformation and knowledge production ...”



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

... the current archival records preserved in South Africa's mainstream archives largely consist of documents that were generated after the arrival of the Europeans in this part of the world. These records, which are stored in archival repositories, mostly in paper and microfilm formats, reflect very little about the indigenous communities. "Therefore, it is important that the lives of ordinary people should be documented. This will also help to close the gap that exists in terms of archival holdings in public archival repositories, which reflect mostly white privilege. Oral source is an important part of recreation and rethinking of the past, especially to those who had never had an opportunity in the past ... One way of building an inclusive archive, said Professor Ngoepe, is through embarking on a national oral history project that adopts the model of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Furthermore, the South African government should consider developing a policy on inter-repository repatriation of archives to the communities about which they were created. "Failure to address the situation of 'archives without archives' will render these repositories white elephants and empty vessels."

I'm confused.

The speaker wants to redress imbalance through changes to holdings and access.

### **A. Holdings:**

1. Is oral history the principal way to document hidden voices?
2. How can documenting gaps (instead of passively receiving product) go back very far in time? Is there a difference between oral history and oral tradition?
3. If archivists do not de-accession the records of colonial/white administrations won't they still be performing the role of archives with archives?
4. If oral history is treated as archives won't that be the same also? Is it the nature of the mission that changes (holding things that aren't archives instead)?
5. Can shaping of the "official" record (via documentation and appraisal policies) do anything to fill in the gaps? What happens to impartiality then - when an access purpose is built into the process of formation?

### **B. Access:**

1. Shouldn't we also be re-imagining how to broaden access to those records of colonial/white administrations we already hold?
2. Might not broadening the scope of documentation activity to encompass more and more communities result in material in the archives that interests fewer and fewer? Because more narrowly focussed like a cultural who-do-you-think-you-are jigsaw (it's all about me-me-me). What price white elephants then?
3. Does the multiplication of "alternative" sources broaden or confuse the story told by the archives we hold? How could it all be contextualised? When does the archivist cross the line between custodian and teller-of-tales?

With reference to B.3, I refer you to the session on *Documenting Australian Society* presented by McCausland, Piggott, Shapley et al to the 2015 Hobart Conference and my [subsequent musings](#) on how this could be integrated into an access gateway based on my *Modest Proposal*.



## **Catastrophe in NSW**

**2019, August 22: [Imagining](#)**

I went last night to the NSWASA Branch meeting at which the Exec Director of State Records [Adam Lindsay] spoke. There was talk of consultations preparatory to possible revision of the Act – behind closed doors and in the open. These days, I'm unlikely to hear about such things in either case. There was much discussion of Collection Management (CM) and Recordkeeping (RK) but no mention (that I heard – I'm also a bit deaf now) of a



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

postcustodial model (PM) which was, at least in part, behind the drafting of the current legislation – imperfectly applied (I’ve called it a 2½ generation Act) but there all the same.



Those at the meeting seemed comfortable that they knew what CM and RK meant, though perhaps (upon examination) it would be found there was less consensus about what those terms implied (but that wasn’t tested). I feel that, had it been brought up, there would have been little agreement about what PM means or what it implies. The Q&A format is not conducive to exposition so, for my own satisfaction, I have spent some of the intervening hours setting out what PM might (I say might) look like in concrete terms.

### **Separation of CM and RK**

Give them to separate agencies. In separate departments. On different planets if possible. The conflation of the two confuses our own thinking and everyone else’s understanding of our purpose.

### **RK to Focus on “Make and Keep”**

This begins with functional appraisal – to identify records that need to be made in the first place and then kept; not those which, having been made, should survive. Under this approach, archival records (those required to be made and kept forever or for just a little while) “exist” before they are created. These are all we care about. The rest don’t matter.

### **RK Sets the Standards**

The most important would be the migration protocols and the identification of metadata requisite for moving archival records on. The biggest obstacle to the r/keeping standards regime at present is that they often apply before appraisal occurs and, as a result, are more onerous than they need be.

### **Who’s Responsible for Carrying Them Out?**

Agencies would be functionally responsible for archival records regardless of location and regardless of age. Thus, Col Sec records would remain the responsibility of Pr&C. Forever. Yes, as functions fragment this becomes problematic but it would be for the CM descriptive system to sort this out (see below). Orphans (such as colonial era defence records) would become the responsibility of CM or get transferred to the Feds.

### **Execution of Appraisal Decisions**

Appraisal would be a priori ([formed or conceived beforehand](#)) not post hoc. Whether records are made or kept is decided upon before they exist. Responsibility then lies for both making and keeping with agencies (including CM for the records they hold) under Plans (to be approved and monitored by RK on the WA model) to implement appraisal outcomes for archival records in their charge in accordance with standards set by RK.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

### **Who Pays?**

Fiscal responsibility (regardless of location or age) would lie with responsible agencies. Forever. This eliminates Treasury-inspired nonsense about cross-charging and collection valuation.

### **Monitoring Performance**

Someone other than RK or CM would audit performance. Enforcement is something else again.

### **Elimination of Obligation to Transfer**

Richard Cox once wrote that because we assert imperium over the archival record, it is no wonder agencies care little for them. Why should they when we tell them it's exclusively our business? A case where we needed to be more careful about what we wished for. If agencies are obliged to shoulder their archival responsibilities (or pay CM or trusted third parties to provide storage and access) it follows that ....

### **“Collection” Becomes an Obsolete Idea**

Hallelujah!! CM no longer obsesses on what they hold. Their remit applies to the entirety of archival records – throughout Government. Estrays too maybe. From Day 1, not 30 years later. Thereafter - forever and ever. Amen. The descriptive system, which also assigns functional responsibility, registers archival records from the moment they are identified during appraisal (before they even exist) and thus becomes a registry-of-registries rather than an access-facilitation device.

### **Access Becomes a Different Idea**

At the borders of imagination, it would also serve as a foundation stone (or keystone) for a federated access system linking discovery systems maintained (according to RK access standards) by every agency holding archival records (including CM) - opening the door, maybe, to a clever marriage between [contingency and ubiquity](#).

Is all or any of this possible? Many will say that PM is not practical and never was owing to fiscal and political “realities”. We’ll never know because twenty-five years have been frittered away in pursuit of other ideas. Despite David Bearman, we’ve remained trapped inside methodologies inherited from our own past from which we have seemed unable to break free – conceptually or actually. Actual enslavement may have been unavoidable, but conceptual enslavement is unforgivable. It’s worth remembering that those who allow conceptual thinking to be polluted by perceived obstacles will always live in the past. The antonym for practical is impractical (not theoretical). The antonym for theoretical is applied. Application is a different conversation. No worthwhile change has ever taken place except by those able to imagine the impossible.

### **2020, July 28: ‘Just nuts’: Historian decries archives merger proposal**

<<**Joanna Sassoon:** ...in at least one other state, there is a merger between archives and another organisation being conducted inch by inch and under the radar. I’ve not seen anything in the public domain as to the existence of a strong business case to support this proposal.>>

### **2020, July 30:**

<<**Alan Ventress:** ... What is remarkable is this proposal was presented to the Parliamentary Inquiry as a 'done deal' without any business case, as a thought bubble tacked onto other valid proposals for changes to the State Records Act 1998. The Hon Don Harwin MLC whose idea this is, was on the Board of State Archives and Records NSW for many years, but the core role and functions of the agency seem to have gone in one ear and out of the other ... Don Harwin is appearing tomorrow afternoon and ... Adam Lindsay, the current Director is appearing for a second time!





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**... The following is a letter I wrote to the Chair, Hon Shayne Mallard MLC, NSW Legislative Council Parliamentary Inquiry, into the State Records Act 1998 on 4 June 2020 ...**

I draw your attention to the following in Adam Lindsay's submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into State Records Act 1998 and the policy paper on its review dated 29 April 2020 ...

In fact, the refusal to open our minds to contemporary or progressive approaches to the management of our Collection is, perhaps, precisely the reason there is a backlog. The insular and covetous approach to management of the Collection displayed by previous leadership has only served to result in poor public awareness of one of the State's most valuable cultural assets.

This is a patently false and misleading statement and an unacceptable interpretation of the facts. There was never an insular and covetous approach during my time or in earlier periods. As you know I worked at State Records NSW from 2001-2012 initially as an Associate Director (2001-2008) and Director (2008-2012). During this time massive and concerted attention was made to raise public awareness of the collection through exhibitions both physical and web based, social media, a State Records blog, publication of Archives in Brief, the Archives Research Kit (circulated to over 40 public libraries and archives in NSW) the establishment of a volunteers program to make the collection even more accessible, not to mention the hundreds of hours of unpaid overtime that staff such as myself, Christine Yeats, Manager Public Access Gail Davis Senior Archivist, Public Access, Lindsay Allen, Senior Archivist Reading Room and many other dedicated staff provided by giving talks about the archives on weekends and after hours. Christine Yeats and myself also attended hundreds of functions where we tirelessly advocated for State Records to politicians, public servants and the cultural leadership, not only in Sydney, but in NSW and Australia. In addition we represented State Records to the archives and records management and professional communities by presenting papers at conferences and writing articles for key journals covering the discipline..

In addition during this period there were substantial efforts to make the collection widely known and accessible through the publication of guides to the Centenary of Federation and the Sesqui Centenary of Responsible Government in NSW, which in themselves considerable undertakings requiring research, resources and scholarship.

In the collaboration with the Historic Houses Trust - Bridging Sydney exhibition and book, I wrote a chapter entitled Politics and Players in which I did in my own time. This book and my chapter highlights the State archives collection in a very positive way.

A cursory examination of previous annual reports would have indicated to even the most inexperienced researcher the time and effort that has been put in for many years to raise the profile of the archives collection and to make it more accessible to all.

State Records NSW Board was always updated on a monthly basis through a list of publicity during the preceding month. These actions by management are hardly the hallmarks of an organisation Mr Lindsay dismisses as insular and covetous

Finally I would also contend that the management of the State's archives have always striven to make the archives available and accessible to the public from the establishment of the Archives Office of NSW in 1960.

Mr Lindsay's statement does a grave disservice to those who preceded him at State Archives and Records NSW.>>

### **Indefensible Bastion?**

A J P Taylor once quipped that those 19<sup>th</sup> century monarchies which adopted the double-headed eagle as an emblem never seemed to know which way they were going. The two-faced [Janus](#) is sometimes used as an emblem for [History's handmaiden](#) and even for [Archiving](#). David Bearman once quipped that custody is a good thing – someone should do it. But for 25 years we have maintained the notion of a duality of record-keeping **and** custody put into a single role instead of preferring recordkeeping (**subsuming** custody). Taking custody of archival “collections” is how we still think of fulfilling our long-term recordkeeping goals. Good governance through record-keeping can



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

appear to be a mechanism for identifying the miniscule proportion of records that are to be incorporated into the collection. The fundamental conflict between being the recordkeeping authority while simultaneously taking on operational responsibility for managing the archival remnant has been papered over (you can't regulate your own behaviour).



We ourselves are confused and divided over this duality (cf. earlier threads dealing with the concept of collection and the balance of duty between the record and the user). Is it any wonder that we have difficulty in explaining it to others? Is it surprising that, as the Internet expands our user base exponentially, many amongst our stakeholders now value content over context? Is it not predictable that those wishing to subsume us (for whatever reasons) choose to recalibrate this febrile duality, which hardly anyone understands, to our disadvantage? Have we anyone to blame but ourselves that in 2020 we are being called upon to defend ourselves as if curatorial achievement was all that mattered? Even if the accusations -

- refusal to open our minds to contemporary or progressive approaches to the management of our Collection,
- insular and covetous approach to management of the Collection,
- poor public awareness of one of the State's most valuable cultural assets,

are correct (and I don't concede that they are), they do not argue for putting the State Archives into the hands of a curator or for it to be merged with a heritage body. Rather they support, if true, the proposition that the State Collection should be given to a curator and the Recordkeeping Authority placed into the hands of a recordkeeper with oversight of all State records (including the State Collection).

We have not properly learned (much less successfully communicated to others) that recordkeeping requirements can be achieved by choosing from an array of alternative methods. Taking custody is one, but not the only one. An alternative would be giving custody to someone else under supervision (control) by the recordkeeping authority. In a small way, this is already done using places of deposit. In some statutes, I think the entire "collection" could, under existing provisions, be devolved in this way but that would clearly be beyond the intent of legislation and probably would need some review, very different from the one being undertaken in NSW. To say nothing of funding.

The SARA website lists its [functions](#) as a single blended list. It is already the case that not all State archives are held in the "State Archives Collection". It is already the case, on a small scale, that arrangements for dealing with State archives must extend beyond the Collection to access arrangements for 30+ records held elsewhere and for those in places of deposit (including oversight of description). Imagine now that instead of these functions belonging to one agency they were assigned to two. Imagine the **State Archives Collection** is just one more agency subject to the Act, to standards under the Act, and to regulation by the **Recordkeeping Authority**, just like any other government department or office.



Recordkeeping Authority	State Archives Collection
<p>1.setting and monitoring standards for the creation, management and disposal of State records</p> <p>2.providing practical advice, guidance and training to NSW public sector agencies in all aspects of records management</p> <p>3.identifying State records that should be retained as State Archives and authorising the disposal of those which should not</p> <p>4.guiding public sector agencies in administering public access to those State records for which they are responsible <u>including those which are more than 30 years old</u></p> <p>5.making the best use of information technology and communications to improve our services and business.</p>	<p>1.providing centralised and cost-effective storage and retrieval services for the semi-active records of public sector agencies</p> <p>2.storing the State Archives Collection in appropriate environments and ensuring that those stored elsewhere are also stored to the necessary standards</p> <p>3.using micro-preservation and macro-preservation techniques to preserve the State Archives Collection</p> <p>4.documenting and cataloguing State Archives in their functional and administrative context</p> <p>5.making State records <u>in the Collection</u> <del>more than 30 years old</del> available for public access and use</p> <p>6.interpreting, promoting and enhancing public awareness of the State Archives Collection</p> <p>7.making the best use of information technology and communications to improve our services and business.</p>

I have indicated by underlining and strike through the adjustments that would need to be made. Despite my personal misgivings, I have left documenting the State Archives (in their entirety) with the Collection rather than the Authority. If this had already been done, the Parliamentary Committee would have two questions to answer not one – the future of the Authority and that of the Collection.

This separation would take time and we've run out of time. It is something we should been working towards for years. But we fluffed it. When the Opera House opened (after the Large Hall was re-purposed) some wag said that Sydney had a world-class Concert Hall and all that was needed now was a decent venue for the opera. I don't say that we have world class archives programmes and that we still need good recordkeeping regimes. We have good recordkeeping regimes but they continue to be imperilled by misunderstanding of their role and function. The simplest and most effective way to remedy this and fend off future assaults (at least of this kind) would be to hive off the collections from those that are working effectively in the recordkeeping role and to establish new recordkeeping authorities for those which aren't. But that won't happen. No one wants it. Not even us.

**2020, July 31:**

<<Adrian Cunningham: I agree that we have not been good at explaining the dual nature of the roles and responsibilities of government archives and records authorities and that we should not be surprised that bureaucrats and politicians struggle to appreciate such complexities and subtleties. Separation of the roles into two separate agencies could clarify matters and could indeed work very well in practice. But I doubt that such separation would give us any greater levels of protection against the kinds of thought bubbles and brain farts that we have been seeing lately from politicians and bureaucrats...Under the separation model outlined by Chris I could well imagine the bean counters saying that the roles of the recordkeeping authority could and should be performed by [others]...Or they may decide that it is a role that can be dispensed with entirely. Similarly, the custodial role could well be given to [someone else]...I see arguing for separation (while it may have an attractive logic), is a high risk one ... the question is - is there any logical model that stands a better than even chance of being sustainable in the face of bureaucratic ignorance and thought bubbles? ...>>



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

That is indeed the question and I agree that separation involves its own risks that recordkeeping could be absorbed into another agency. The function originally belonged, after all, to the old Public Service Board in Canberra. But what is it that we care about, sustaining the function or the office? My argument is a utilitarian one – not philosophical – relating to the current situation. It's the stuff they want to get their hands on, the recordkeeping not so much. Separation enables us to put the collection out as a kind of *enfants perdus* to engage the enemy's attention while we develop deep defence for the recordkeeping. How apposite that in Dutch *verloren hoop* translates as “heap”.

We agree, you and I, that the complexity of the duality role makes it difficult to argue, incomprehensible to the public and to obtuse politicians, and it is easily distorted by calculating bureaucrats. Arguments that curatorial responsibilities have been neglected don't logically require merger with anyone. And if they did, it wouldn't need to be with this other heritage body as proposed (I forget its name). It could just as easily be a re-merger with the State Library, or with the Museum, or the Gallery – as you say. If you come at it from the curatorial end, that's the kind of fight you're in.

But if you come at it from the recordkeeping end, it's a different tactical argument. The collections of these other GLAM outfits are not regulated by the Recordkeeping Authority. Uniquely, the State Archives Collection is. That's the difference. Different role, different governance arrangements. I don't say it's a winning argument – because intellectually any GLAM institution could still be given custody of the State Archives Collection under supervision (control) of the Recordkeeping Authority. But it would be a different argument to the one taking place in Macquarie Street just now and the tail wouldn't be wagging the dog.

When all is said and done, however, you are right to say that there is ultimately no guaranteed winning argument. The separation I propose is already in place (up to a point) in Western Australia and has been for many years and that didn't prevent merger proposals there. I was personally involved in NZ when a purchaser/provider split did not help against a proposed takeover into a larger heritage unit within D. of Internal Affairs. The [ACT regime](#) is the driest, most collection-free of all so there is really nothing to squabble over there.

### **2020, August 4:**

In relation to Joanna's original posting, a version of the article referred to on the [website of CAMD](#) (Council of Australian Museum Directors) makes the following claim –

A parliamentary committee is reviewing the [proposal by NSW Arts Minister Don Harwin](#) to merge State Archives and Records, home to 14 million items, and [Sydney Living Museums](#). National Archives of Australia, the Sydney Opera House, Museums and Galleries of NSW and the Art Gallery of NSW have endorsed the merger as a way to optimise public engagement with the state's past. They are also united that public access to the archives needs to be expanded through wider digitisation, with records to become available after 20 years, not the existing 30...In no other state had a similar amalgamation been contemplated, according to the Federation of Australian Historical Societies, “presumably because it is such an uneasy and even illogical fit”. But amalgamation has been opposed by archivists, historians and former administrators...[also]... Former City of Sydney historian Shirley Fitzgerald ...[and]...Professor Stephen Garton, the University of Sydney's senior deputy vice-chancellor...

The Proposal is supported by Chair of the Sydney Living Museums, Naseema Sparks and Former Greater Sydney chief commissioner Lucy Turnbull. Can anyone confirm that

1. NAA has indeed “endorsed” the merger? And that support seems to be coming from institutions, politicians, and bureaucrats rather than users?





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

2. The Sydney Opera House, Museums & Galleries of NSW, and the Art Gallery of NSW have policies on access to public records?
3. Someone (presumably including these four bodies) has or is developing proposals in concert to reduce the closed access period?

Does ASA have a position on the merger and what do we, as a profession feel about NAA's alleged endorsement of it?

<<**Alan Ventress: In answer to your question 1 all the evidence/transcripts etc can be found [here](#). David Fricker did endorse the proposal. In relation to questions 2 and 3 I don't know perhaps Catherine Robinson at SARA could enlighten us?**>>

<<**Michael Piggott: Here it is (my emphasis):**

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** Can I broaden that? Let me go back step. You are internationally accredited and acclaimed as an expert on these matters and we are very grateful for your participation today. Do you have any comments about the relationship and the partnership between SARA and Sydney Living Museums from what you have witnessed over the last couple of years?

**Mr FRICKER:** As I said in my submission, I think many benefits can be obtained by any sort of collaboration or joining up of resources between memory institutions generally so I think an important part of an archives is access and it is having those public programs that make sure that the archival collection is promoted; that all citizens of New South Wales are aware that this fantastic asset exists; and that access to the collection is made as enjoyable and as engaging as is possible, including outreach into education programs to get younger citizens engaged and involved with the history and their identity. **I think that is a very important benefit that can flow from these collaborative arrangements and from the joining up, the consolidation, of those two institutions.** In my submission I pointed to one distinction that I think should be maintained, to make sure that the archival collection was not seen as something which was sort of picked, which is not a curated collection.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** Absolutely.

**Mr FRICKER:** The archival record needs to be accumulated on very neutral and objective criteria to make sure that it follows the rules of evidence, if you like. It does not sort of become constructed to suit one particular narrative of history.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** I think we are all in vicious agreement on that.

**Mr FRICKER:** That is right. Very briefly, in my submission I pointed to what I thought was the strength of the paper in terms of establishing those committees and having a committee which was given the authority to make sure that that archival collection was being collected and maintained in a proper way.

**The Hon. BEN FRANKLIN:** Thank you Mr Fricker. I will pick up on that point with Mr Hinchcliffe who talked about opportunities for exhibition.

<<**Debra Leigo: I'm still shaking my head in disbelief .... and the implications. So why not join up the National Archives and National Museum .... and for even more collaboration and synergies with also the Sound and Film Archive and the National Maritime Museum and the Australian War Memorial? >>**

It's enough to make you want to spit. Maybe this is what happens when you think about archives as a collection. Better still, Michael, why don't we write to [Christian Porter](#) to suggest he starts thinking about merging the [D-G's position](#) with that of [Karen Quinlan](#) [Director of the National Portrait Gallery].

<<**Michael Piggott: Good idea, Chris. As to your question earlier today (Does ASA have a position on the merger...?) no point ... writing a submission [that] can be discounted by a retort ..."but the President of the ICA himself has ...". Interesting times.>>**

To surrender in the face of "[pathetic futility](#)" is to forfeit the opportunity for



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

... searching analysis ... as illumination for the future. Only by sturdy self-examination and self-criticism can the necessary habits for detached and wise judgment be established and fortified so as to become effective when the ... process is again subjected to stress and strain

...

ASA is a member of ICA (or used to be). Nothing stopping them posting to the ICA List denouncing the views of the President concerning the takeover virus. Come to think of it. I'm a member of ICA myself. Nothing stopping me from doing the same, I suppose. Just 'cause Donald Trump is President, it doesn't mean we don't listen to Dr Fauci. Even in interesting times. Especially then perhaps.

*Walking in the footsteps / Of society's lies / I don't like what I see no more  
Sometimes I wish that I was blind / Sometimes I wait forever*

**2020, August 5:**

**<<Cassie Findlay:...ASA Advocacy Committee made a submission to the Parliamentary Committee looking at the merger (and other aspects of the State Records Act), Julia Mant and Tim Robinson gave evidence at a hearing and a response was made to a committee question on notice.>>**

Thanks, Cassie. It is clear that ASA spoke for the profession. And spoke well. In what guise was David Fricker speaking?

1. For himself?
2. For NAA?
3. For the Commonwealth Government?
4. For ICA?

Regardless of whether or not he spoke in any formal sense for ICA doesn't the position need to be clarified (by ICA) that his views are his own and not those of the profession?

**<<Alan Ventress: I wrote this email to David Fricker on 28 June 2020. But did not get a reply ...**

... As you may know i was called to give evidence on 1 June 2020 and I found it to be a rather surreal experience, sitting at home looking at each individual in turn as they asked their questions.

I know you have said it to many people a number of times about the lack of detail of what is actually being proposed with the merger of these two very different agencies. Therein lies the nub of the issue.

None of us know and from my experience the government CANNOT be trusted. In my opinion, this whole proposal is crying out for a proper business case to be put forward with all the pros and the cons. Not some pathetic thought bubble tacked onto the end of the review of the SRAct!!

I was pleased that Fred Nile asked me a question relating to my initial submission about a business case in my evidence. I found it especially confronting that this proposal had been aired WITHOUT a business case. What on earth were the NSW Government thinking? Surely due process, transparency and good governance demand a business case??

Historically this sort of merger proposal smacks of desperation by the NSW government. Both agencies have been starved of funds for many years and a merger looks as if the government is doing something, anything to distract, no matter how bizarre it is to most historians, archivists and record keepers.

The focus of exhibitions and publication of the glossy magazine Vital Signs were a strategy David Roberts and I tried between 2001 and 2012 in a valiant effort to raise the profile of State Records NSW and increase our budget allocation in the process.

Sadly despite some ground -breaking, very modern and edgy exhibitions such as Art Meets Archive, Natura Morta, Sydney Resort of Thieves, The House of Exquisite Memory, In the Realm of the Censors, Romance and Industry and In Living Memory we were



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

unsuccessful, and due to severe budget cuts in 2011/12 I had to close the city reading room at The Rocks.

Ministers were always keen to open new exhibitions to get personal publicity, but reluctant to open the purse strings at budget time.

From my perspective and experience exhibitions are low on the list of statutory responsibilities for State Archives and Records NSW. The main game is archives, records, regulation, digitisation, preservation. Not diverting funds by entertaining the general public, through more and more exhibitions, physical and online!! As Peter Watts pointed out in his evidence, when he was Director of the Historic Houses Trust (now Sydney Living Museums) out of the top ten exhibitions in terms of visitor numbers, only one, Bridging Sydney used archives from State Records NSW. His final comment says it all in my opinion. A marriage between a giraffe and an elephant ...>>

**<<Louise Trott: The ASA submission is [here](#):**

**... The ASA's position is:**

1. The State Records and Archives Authority is the State's key evidence and accountability body and this role must not be diluted. Archives enable good recordkeeping in support of organisational efficiency, corporate memory and good governance. In relation to the latter, in democratic societies, government archives are vitally important enablers of a healthy democracy.

2. The State Records Act needs to support digital transformation and support the State's world-leading digital first capabilities and digital customer service innovations. The Act must give the Authority a mandate to prepare for and coordinate the management of the archives of tomorrow.

3. The State Records Act needs to empower the Authority to deal with the challenges of genuine digital transformation and the maintenance of digital evidence. It is not enough for an archival agency to collect records. These sources of evidence must be protected so that they remain authentic, accessible and useable for as long as needed.

4. There is strength in diversity: It is the ASA's strongly held position that a strong and vibrant ecosystem of collaborating cultural institutions is critically important for the continued success of our democracy and our State. The ASA believes that the merging cultural institutions based on a perceived shared model of digital delivery is not appropriate for archival institutions.

**Other archivists and recordkeepers made submissions, including Amanda Barber, Jenni Stapleton, Recordkeeping Innovation P/L, Alan Ventress, Jumbunna Institute, RIMPA, Geoff Hinchcliffe, Gerald Calihanna, William Oates, and so on.>>**

**<<Andrew Waugh: ... He makes it quite clear that he is appearing in his capacity as DG of the NAA. He does mention that he is president of the ICA, but at no time does he represent that he is speaking on behalf of the ICA. He also specifically cautions the Committee that as a Commonwealth public servant he will not comment on NSW government policy. Given that it is the government's policy to merge the two institutions, this means that Fricker can neither support or condemn the merger.**

**Given this proviso, I think it is misrepresenting his evidence to say that he supported the merger.**

**The closest he comes to support is the following: "I think that [outreach and improved access] is a very important benefit that can flow from these collaborative arrangements and from the joining up, the consolidation, of those two institutions." [p16]**

**Incidentally, Fricker's evidence gives some interesting sidelights on the NAA's position with respect to personal papers.**

**He notes that the key value of a government archival collection is its neutrality; it is not selected to present a particular side or position. This is not necessarily true of personal papers, which can be selected by the donor to present a particular face. Fricker cautions that it is important not to give the impression that the government collection is curated (i.e. selected for a particular purpose), and that you don't give the imprimature of neutrality of the government archives to personal collections.>>**



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**<<He makes it quite clear that he is appearing in his capacity as DG of the NAA. He does mention that he is president of the ICA, but at no time does he represent that he is speaking on behalf of the ICA. He also specifically cautions the Committee that as a Commonwealth public servant he will not comment on NSW government policy.>>**

This is a question of hats. There is a well-established, well-understood formula for dealing with this: *I appear today as D-G and my views should in no way be taken as representing the international body whose president I am.* You use those words or leave the situation open to ambiguity and doubt - carelessly or deliberately, people are left with idea that he is speaking as the head of the profession. It's not rocket science, this.

**<<I think it is misrepresenting his evidence to say that he supported the merger.>>**

C'mon. Finesse it any way you like, how can the words

*"I think that is a very important benefit that can flow from these collaborative arrangements and from the joining up, the consolidation, of those two institutions"*

be interpreted any other way? This is a political exercise. Proponents of the merger are scrambling to create the impression that it is supported by the great and the good. Fricker is savvy enough to know this. It is news to me that a public servant is interdicted from honest commentary on the policies of another government, but if he felt so constrained he need not have appeared. You're not suggesting, I suppose, that he lied to the committee, that he really opposes the merger, but feared to say so from a sense of public service rectitude?

**<<Andrew Waugh: Just goes to show how different people can read different things into words. My reading of the quote is that it's a motherhood statement - if you amalgamate the two institutions, that's a benefit. David Fricker doesn't say if he thinks it is sufficient benefit.**

**People seem to have interpreted David Fricker's lack of condemnation of the merger as support. However, I don't agree. Fricker says right up front to the committee that he will not discuss the policy decision behind the merger. That is, the government has made a policy decision to merge the two institutions, and Fricker does not consider that he should pass judgement on that decision.**

**So why is he giving evidence? My reading of his evidence is that he has two points to make to the committee.**

- The first concerns the \*other\* aspect of the review of the act - how to improve the recordkeeping practices of the NSW public service.**
- The second is more interesting. It is, given the policy decision to merge the two institutions, what should be ringfenced to ensure that the archives survive intact. By archives, I don't mean the institution per se, but the collection and, particularly, the special features that give it value. In doing so, I think that David Fricker mounts a very interesting argument about the type of GLAM institution that a government archive should \*not\* be merged with and why.>>**

**2020, August 6:**

**<<Andrew Waugh: Just goes to show how different people can read different things into words.>>**

Certainly does. I think this is about meanings, not about words. Meaning attaches to words as a result of context, Archivists should know that. The context of the words that are objected to (*very important benefit that can flow from ... the joining up, the consolidation, of those two institutions*) comes in response to a request from Ben Franklin for comment on *the relationship and the partnership between SARA and Sydney Living Museums.*

**<< the government has made a policy decision to merge the two institutions, and Fricker does not consider that he should pass judgement on that decision.>>**





## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

But he does pass judgement, doesn't he? He approves of it (*important benefit can flow from consolidation*). Not just harmony, not just collaboration, but "joining up". Not just joining up with other heritage programmes to improve access but merging it with this one, as proposed, here and now. Those words in response to that question can't be anything else but a judgement on the specifics of this amalgamation.



Don Harwin



David Fricker



Ben Franklin

Is he the helpless victim, as you say, of a policy decision already made? If so, why did he bother going? Why turn up if you don't approve the policy? I think you may be correct that he wanted to pass over the specifics and talk motherhood. That is what is in the written submission – an orthodox defence of the Indefensible Bastion, of the duality that enables those in his position to simultaneously urge record-keeping and custody along two different tracks. Like they're two different things. Oh, let's all be glamorous together but don't forget the record-keeping because that's important too. As if they can be separated like that conceptually.

But the politicians were too wily for him. They could see the flaw in the duality argument. They needed to pin him on the custody issue. In oral testimony, they pushed him to the wall (beyond the written brief) and demanded to hear the opinion of an "*internationally accredited and acclaimed ... expert ... about the relationship and the partnership between SARA and Sydney Living Museums*". And they got what they wanted. They forced him into a corner where he couldn't stand on motherhood and offered him a choice. And he made the wrong one.

How strange that politicians can see the flaw in the duality argument when we cannot. You don't "ring fence" the archives. The archives have to be protected like the rest of the public record and in the same way. You don't do that by discriminating between good and bad GLAM institutions to identify ones that can be trusted to manage the archives (as if their manner of curating satisfied r/keeping requirements). They are not to be entrusted with making their own r/keeping decisions (any more than public offices are) except within the recordkeeping framework - so it matters not a jot what their curatorial practices are. They need to be compelled to handle the archives in accordance with r/keeping demands not their own curatorial practices. The statutory exclusion of the state collections from archives law recognizes (rightly or wrongly) that the recordkeeping regime does not apply to their holdings and that they are different.

But no, Andrew, you (and David Fricker by your account) are happy to separate these things and you have left all that other stuff outside in the realm of "improved" recordkeeping practices in NSW. What goes on inside fortress archives has nothing to do with what goes on outside it apparently. You actually incorporate the duality into your two heads of argument in defence of David Fricker. You have to separate them conceptually to make your case. Meanwhile the archives are left in a curatorial safe place – a custody realm that you can approve of and that looks, by your account, to be a different world altogether from "improved" recordkeeping in NSW. But hang about; isn't that what I was arguing for –



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

separation of record-keeping and custody? No it was not. I was talking about recordkeeping that subsumes custody. Not “two points to make to the committee” but one.

If you're confused into thinking that because you're the recordkeeper the archives are safe in your hands you're going to get very muddled when someone wants to merge you with someone else. Am I angry about all this? You bet I am. They tried to merge me with a heritage outfit twice in my career, once in Melbourne and once in Wellington, so I know whereof I speak. And no, I'm not reliving my past, I'm sharing insights you get only from plumbing the depths. Records (including archives) deserve to be in the custody of someone, curatorial or operational, who will be part of a recordkeeping regime. Who will do, to be blunt about it, what they are told. You don't abandon the archives to a curator on the basis that you approve their practices any more than you abandon public records to agencies you like. You make sure they're being kept by someone who obeys the rules. Bringing them together with some heritage outfit that thinks they understand the recordkeeping rules is probably the worst outcome.

**<<Deborah Leigo: should we presume you refer to archives principles and practices rather than government legislation which is subject to change?>>**

Kinda. Recordkeeping principles and practices is better but, so long as we eschew the word “collection”, I won't quibble over words. As I say meanings are what matter. So yes, the principles and practices are our mystery, our thing. They are, as Joanna said once on this list, how archivists “think” not just what archivists do. That's what we care about. That's what we should care about, anyway. That's what any self-respecting “internationally accredited and acclaimed... expert ...” should be standing up for. They aren't enduring these principles and practices – Bearman and Cook taught us that, as have Scott, McKemmish, Upward and many, many others.

But they evolve within a tradition, our tradition, they serve an abiding purpose. The selection of methods we use to achieve unchanging goals is what we struggle over – and sometimes contend for. That, at any rate, is how I'd like it to be. When I read the old books, I find there out-dated principles and practices that I cannot apply but they are infused with a spirit, a sense of direction, that makes me feel I belong. I can say I am of these people. They knew. Didn't mean to wax lyrical.

The legislation is Ir matter. It Is a means to an end. We defend it when they want to change it in ways that are inimical to our abiding purpose. As here.

**<<Andrew Waugh: One dimension to the response to this policy decision is to either approve or disapprove. But irrespective of whether you approve or disapprove, there is a second dimension to the response: what safeguards need to be in place to ensure the integrity of the archives if it goes ahead. In my view, Fricker has chosen not to respond to the first dimension, and to focus on the second. In making this choice, even the DG of the NAA is not a free agent, and would answer to the Federal government>>**

This has now become pointless. I say

*“I think that is a very important benefit that can flow from these collaborative arrangements and from the joining up, the consolidation, of those two institutions”*

is a response in the affirmative to the first dimension. You say it isn't. Let's leave it at that.

**2020, August 8:**

Now. Advice to defence attorneys: If the facts are on your side argue the facts; if the law is on your side argue the law; if both are against you confuse things as much as possible. Since he refuses to admit the **smoking gun**, let us look instead at Andrew's **theory of the crime**.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

<<5 Aug: Fricker says right up front to the committee that he will not discuss the policy decision behind the merger. That is, the government has made a policy decision to merge the two institutions, and Fricker does not consider that he should pass judgement on that decision.>> <<6 Aug: The starting position is that the merger of the two institutions is a policy decision of the NSW government ... I can see that excessive focusing on the approve/disapprove dimension is potentially counterproductive as it means that the witnesses forgo the opportunity to shape the merger if it goes ahead.>>

**Theory A** It is not yet decided to merge SARA with anyone and the committee is hearing evidence on whether or not a merger should take place at all. But no, according to Andrew the policy is settled and it would be improper for a Commonwealth bureaucrat to assist the committee in this way. But if the policy is settled, those arguing against a merger of any kind were wasting their time as, under this theory of the crime, Fricker would have been had he been free to express an opinion on any kind of merger (which Andrew says he wasn't and he didn't). If the policy is already settled and the committee isn't able to advise against it, this Theory is a red herring – refer now to Theory C below.

**Theory B:** It is settled Government policy to merge SARA with someone and the committee is hearing evidence to assist them in advising Government on who it should be. But according to Andrew the government has already **“made a policy decision to merge the two institutions”**. Not any two institutions but **“the”** two institutions. So, this doesn't wash.

**Theory C:** It is settled Government policy to merge SARA with Historic Houses and the committee is hearing evidence to assist them in advising Government whether that policy should be implemented. Under this theory, according to Andrew, Fricker shouldn't even be there since the question at issue is one on which propriety prevents him from having a useful opinion. Pretty much the same as Theory A and just as much of a red herring, so far as the Fricker defence is concerned, unless the committee could be persuaded to recommend against the merger and for Government to change its policy.

Under the only tenable theory of the crime (in Andrew's account of it) – *“I can't speak to the merits, I can only advise on the requirements”* - the D-G went to argue in a motherhood kind of way (and in the service of recordkeeping, God save us all) for the kind of qualities any heritage outfit to which SARA might be yoked should have. But if the decision had already been made. And Fricker knew it. And he couldn't argue the merits. What was the point of that?

Further advice to defence attorneys, then: the only way to make this fly is to argue (**Theory D**) that he was there to advise on how the merger should take place. But, even assuming this is an edifying posture for an “internationally accredited and acclaimed ... expert” to adopt, he wasn't asked that, was he? He was asked whether it had merit. And he said it did. Gets us back to the smoking gun which we have now argued to the point of exhaustion but which (if yielded) would move us back into another “dimension”.

<<**Alan Ventress: More on the proposed merger This is the best paragraph**

Now Premier Berejiklian and her disgraced Arts Minister Don Harwin are proposing to merge the State Archives and Records (SARA) with Sydney Living Museums. Why not chuck in the Rabbit Protection Board, the Whale Watching Review Committee and the Sydney Haberdashers Society?>>>

<<**Michael Piggott: ... It's a strong article, and incidentally the sentence following the two you quote goes: "The Government has gained endorsement for the proposal from the National Archives of Australia, the Sydney Opera House, Museums and Galleries NSW and the Art Gallery of NSW – all bodies in thrall to the Coalition Governments in Canberra and Sydney." If the NAA D-G didn't actually mean to or intend to take a position on NSW government policy, he's utterly failed by creating the exact opposite**



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

impression in many many minds ... I had thought this thread had come to a natural end, but Chris earlier today has teased out additional implications. To adopt his legal analogy, in a profession practising open and frank dialogue we'd hear direct from the accused, not only the NAA D-G/ICA President, but also from the person who happily took up the position of Executive Director of Sydney Living Museums in July 2019 -- none other than the Executive Director of the State Archives and Records Authority, a development it described as "signalling the start of a very exciting partnership, one that has enormous potential for both institutions". To adapt the words of a famous German Lutheran pastor, first they came for partnership, then they came for amalgamation.>>

### **2020, September 3:**

<<Max: The transcript for the third and final hearing of the inquiry is now posted. A sobering read, and one that illustrates the poor understanding of our dual-purpose mission (what Chris referred to in another thread as "glamour" and "order"). The Minister laid out his objective to create "a state cultural institution with a history focus embedded in its legislated mission and that is focussed on its collection." Sounds glamorous (as another committee member pointed out "there has been so much reference to sexy in this Committee"). Of course, we get the usual assurances about government recordkeeping... Even as the focus remains on creating a cultural/history museum. Perhaps none of this is surprising as the Minister characterizes State Records, presumably based on his previous Board experience, as having a "narrow approach, which was storage focussed, ignoring public engagement." Who would support that? Might as well make a museum out of it ...>>

The Law of Inverse Relevance: "*The less you intend to do about something, the more you have to keep talking about it.*" Yes, Minister S.1 Ep.1. But I doubt these yokels have the intelligence to form an intention of doing nothing about it. So, the usual assurances will do well enough, I suppose. And "... pray that there's intelligent life somewhere up in space, 'cause there's bugger all down here on Earth" Galaxy Song

### **2020, October 17: Report tabled – State Records Act ... review**

#### **State Records Act 1998 and the policy paper on its review**

<<Alan Ventress: It will be interesting to see the new legislation!>>

### **2020, October 18:**

Yes, indeed.

Predictably, this Report focuses on custody. For some time now, I have been advocating the separation of the custodial and accountability roles of our government record authorities. Such a separation would (in my view) be an obstacle to merging the recordkeeping responsibilities, as is proposed here, within an enlarged entity having curatorial responsibilities for more than government archives since all the arguments in favour of the merger are on the cultural side. No one that I can see actually argued that the merger would result in a better r/keeping regime except for suggested changes to the Act which could be done regardless of any merger. Separating the two roles conceptually would also support the proposition that, **if** government archives are to be lodged with a curatorial entity having larger responsibilities for more diverse historical materials, the government archives therein must be managed according to recordkeeping policy under codes and standards established by a r/keeping authority and not according to cultural policy - i.e. that when dealing with government archives cultural purposes must be **subordinate** to recordkeeping purposes.

Had the profession adopted this position long since, I believe it would have been easier to rebut the merger proposals and to critique them now. But we didn't.





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

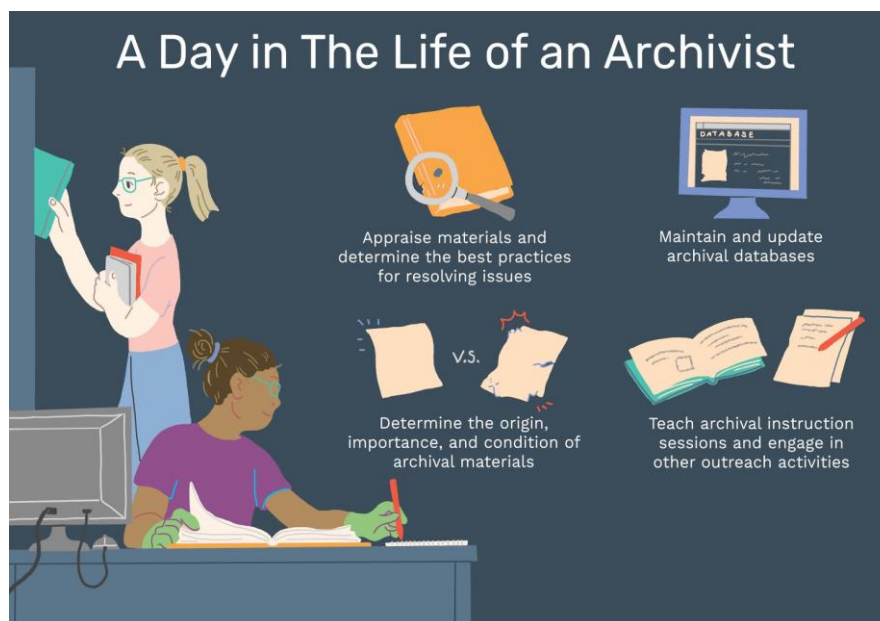
*For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these:  
'It might have been!' John Greenleaf Whittier*

When draft legislation does appear, it is still not too late (instead of fighting a rear-guard action against the merger) to focus on the proper location administratively of the r/keeping functions.

*I do not like the phrase "It might have been!" It lacks force, and life's best truths perverts:  
For I believe we have, and reach, and win, Whatever our deserts. Ella Wheeler Wilcox*

In essence, the Report concludes that SARA's cultural role needs to be transformed and its recordkeeping role maintained.

The committee notes the particular concerns raised by inquiry participants that the replacement of SARA and SLM with a new entity may result in the diminution of existing functions, particularly with regard to government recordkeeping and archiving. The committee acknowledges, in particular, the evidence from the National Archives of Australia on the distinction between government records and private deposits, and maintaining strict standards in legislation for the archival of government records .... the committee seeks to ensure that a strong legislative framework is maintained to uphold government accountability and transparency through government recordkeeping. Therefore the committee recommends that the NSW Government ensure that the legislation giving effect to the new cultural institution clearly defines the government recordkeeping and archival functions of the institution, based on the existing functions of the State Archives and Records Authority of New South Wales. Paras 2.182 – 2.184



Leaving aside the misleading suggestion that the purpose of government recordkeeping is to create an historical artefact - an archival record (as that term is generally understood) - the question remains whether the recordkeeping function should be assigned to the merged entity regardless of what happens to the stuff. While many witnesses urged that the recordkeeping role was an obstacle to the merger none (so far as I can see) was prepared to canvass the argument that the merger raises different issues for the two functions with the attendant logical possibility that the merger of SARA's cultural role might proceed while merger of the recordkeeping role should not. To make that argument, you have to be open to the possibility of separating the two roles administratively as I have long argued which (so far as I can see) most of the hostile witnesses were not.

But a change is nevertheless being proposed in the Report –



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

... the Policy Paper states that the ability for SARA to monitor and enforce compliance with the Act is 'limited', as the Act contains no mandatory mechanism to audit or monitor compliance with its provisions or standards. The Policy Paper explains: The Authority's existing monitoring activities rely on the cooperation of the public office under scrutiny, and the extent of this cooperation impacts compliance verification and the quality of the Authority's responses to complainants .... In addition, 'the financial penalties for breaches of recordkeeping requirements are not practically enforceable' ... it is proposed that SARA (or the new entity) be granted a 'monitoring' power to compel public offices to audit their own recordkeeping practices in whole or in part and to report back on the findings of their investigation. According to Mr Lindsay, this proposal will strengthen the regulation of recordkeeping by enabling public offices to be more accountable ... Ms Tydd, Chief Executive Officer and Information Commissioner, Information and Privacy Commission NSW, shared this view, stating that the requirement to compel a public office to self-audit and then report back 'would actually enhance the ability to regulate'. She added that the proposed reform would also 'shift the burden in an appropriate position, then apply the expertise that exists within SARA to a determination as to the adequacy of that self audit' ... Ms Tydd described self-auditing as a 'very powerful tool' as it places the onus on the regulated entity to ensure compliance while building their own knowledge ... Mr Fricker, National Archives of Australia, ... asserted that compliance as 'an obligation on all government officials' is 'a very strong point', as it provides a legislative basis upon which compliance can be tested. He stated: ... [I]f the legislation made it clear that it was an offence to engage in conduct that leads to the loss or alteration of a record other than by an authorised action, that represents a good level of practice.<sup>355</sup> 3.50 Mr Hinchliffe expressed a similar view, stating: 'As a strong deterrent, consideration should be given to make deliberate and wilful non-compliance a criminal offence'. Paras 3.34 – 3.50



There is great obscurity (not to say confusion) here over notions of criminality, compliance, monitoring, reporting, auditing, and self-audit. The existing legislation is strong but (we are told) unenforceable. Or is it weak and inappropriate? The existing Act already provides for regulation by offence or injunction. If the Report is implemented and the existing powers are not simply maintained in any redrafted legislation but “enhanced” these people will need watching to make sure existing powers (some of them listed below) are not watered down. Someone needs to tell David Fricker that the offence provisions he advocates are already part of the NSW Act. Existing provisions include –



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**s.10 Chief executives to ensure compliance with Act** The chief executive of each public office has a duty to ensure that the public office complies with the requirements of this Act and the regulations and that the requirements of this Act and the regulations with respect to State records that the public office is responsible for are complied with.

**s.11 Obligation to protect records** Each public office must ensure the safe custody and proper preservation of the State records that it has control of ...

**s.12 Records management obligations** Each public office must make and keep full and accurate records of the activities of the office ... establish and maintain a records management program for the public office in conformity with standards and codes of best practice from time to time approved under section 13 ... make arrangements with the Authority for the monitoring by the Authority of the public office's records management program and must report to the Authority, in accordance with arrangements made with the Authority, on the implementation of the public office's records management program.

**s.13 Standards and codes of best practice for records management** The Authority may from time to time approve standards and codes of best practice for records management by public offices. Records management extends to include all aspects of the making, keeping and disposal of records ...

**s.20 Reports by Authority about compliance** The Authority may report to the Minister responsible for a public office any failure by the public office to comply with the requirements of this Act or the regulations or any other matter of concern to the Authority with regard to the public office's obligations under this Act or the regulations.

**s.21 Protection measures** A person must not abandon or dispose of a State record, etc., etc. ... Maximum penalty—50 penalty units. None of the following is a contravention of this section .... (c) anything done by or with the permission of the Authority or in accordance with any practice or procedure approved by the Authority either generally or in a particular case or class of cases (including any practice or procedure approved of under any standards and codes of best practice for records management formulated by the Authority) ... Anything done by a person (*the employee*) at the direction of some other person given in the course of the employee's employment is taken for the purposes of this section not to have been done by the employee and instead to have been done by that other person ...

**s.72 Injunctions to prevent contravention of Act** If a person has contravened, is contravening or is proposing to contravene a provision of this Act, the Supreme Court may, on the application of the Authority, grant an injunction restraining the person from doing so or requiring the person to do any act or thing necessary to avoid or remedy the contravention

...

**PS.** There is a very much more subtle question arising out of David Fricker's argument that government archives are inherently different to "private" archives (a proposition I have refused to concede the whole of my professional life and will not yield on now). Shades of Powell/Hurley. On its face, saying they're different seems to argue against this merger and saying they're the same seems to argue there is no problem. Its resolution lies in the oft stated proposition that archives in libraries, museums, and galleries should be managed as archives not as artefacts or bibliographical tools. And that is true of both government and "private" archival materials.

### **2020, October 21:**

Amusing as it is to see bad recordkeeping figuring in the exposure of bad governance, we can only reflect that such sensationalism trivialises recordkeeping regulation, associating it in the minds of the public and, what is worse, in the minds of politicians, with the political weaponization of anti-corruption measures – the “gotcha” moment. Instead of systematically uncovering flaws and calmly taking corrective action, it all becomes a lurid tale of crime and punishment. Recordkeeping lapses are portrayed as instances of individual dereliction instead of systemic failure. They seem incidental to wrong-doing of a more stimulating kind. The “flies to the carcass” dimension is a legitimate one, but most corruption is routine, low-key, and often undetected.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

As a result, lapses are perceived by the public as dramatic interludes. The idea that recordkeeping regulation is a regular part of good governance is undermined by the high stakes involved in spectacular cases. Either scalps are successfully claimed, which rather dulls the focus on good housekeeping as the instrument of such retribution, or else high crimes and misdemeanours aren't proved, and the whole thing is soon forgotten, along with an understanding of why recordkeeping is important. In the public mind, [data governance](#) is associated with privacy (no bad thing but not the same as anti-corruption). Worse still, politicians (understandably seeing poor recordkeeping as a trap used to ensnare them and a danger to their well-being) become [leery of accountability mechanisms](#).

Data fights corruption by upholding [good governance](#) (“the legal and institutional arrangements and relationships that shape the way decisions are made and authority is exercised”) and there are lessons to be learned (I believe) in sustaining the integrity of recordkeeping as part of good governance, provided the link between good recordkeeping and good governance can be established in the first place. It is often assumed and proclaimed in generalized terms, but seldom demonstrated as to specifics. So that is our first task – to make an argument that recordkeeping should be part of the anti-corruption debate, free of bickering about the State's history.

That done, how do we articulate a role for recordkeeping? The problem with standards is that monitoring and reporting takes place in relation to implementation of the standard, not in relation to performance and outcomes (cf. [aged care sector](#)). Our reporting and monitoring systems, therefore, need to –

- Routinely detect and expose recordkeeping failures,
- Evaluate their significance and guide their correction,
- Incentivize, prioritize reforms, and monitor progress,
- Test ‘what works’ and continuously update standards and monitoring systems.

That's a big job. It would require focus and purpose to advance such a role. It would require an entity capable of discharging the role undistracted by the task of “enhancing access to the stories of our State's history” (laudable though that secondary goal may be). More than that, it would require an entity whose success would depend on making its role and purpose clear to the public without confusion as to another curatorial task. Monitoring the performance of a merged entity having that curatorial task would be but one part of the recordkeeping role. On the principle that you can't audit your own performance, the two roles **could not** belong together.

**From SMH 19 Sep., 2022**

**2022, December 31: Leadership vacuum in NSW**

**<<Adrian Cunningham: See this [interesting news](#) from NSW. The much-debated merger of the NSW State Archives into the Sydney Living Museum formally starts tomorrow, but has no CEO. Adam Lindsay has been acting in the role and has also been a major advocate for the merger. But he was not offered the role during a recent recruitment exercise, so he has announced his departure. Meanwhile, the search for a CEO continues, while State Librarian John Vallance will act as CEO - presumably doing all the jobs (a busy man!) ... Interesting times in New South Wales!>>**

Does anyone know what the arrangements for r/keeping governance are in NSW as of 1/01/23?

A full merger of Sydney Living Museums and the State Archives and Records Authority (SARA) was subject to an upper house inquiry in 2020. That inquiry recommended the functions of SARA be split. The collection of 14 million records, going back to the early days of European settlement, was to be merged into the Museums of History, and its record-keeping functions preserved in a smaller authority.





Will there now be a separate SRO as recommended?

If so, will governance of state records held by MoHNSW be subject to its jurisdiction?

Further to this, have the new arrangements:

- Repealed or amended the [State Records Act](#) 1998?
- Abolished the State Records & Archives Authority (s.63) or modified its jurisdiction?
- Ensured that the management of the state archives “collection” (ghastly term) is subject to Part 2 of the Act?
- Or, in the alternative, ensured that SRA (if it still exists) continues to have the management of the “collection” while it remains within MoHNSW?
- Or, established MoHNSW as a place of deposit under the jurisdiction of SARA? (s.36)
- Or (insult to injury), established MoHNSW as a “State collecting institution”? (s.5)

When we were drafting the Act, John Cross always argued for the preservation of the Authority in preference to vesting the statutory powers over state records (including the “collection”) in the hands of a statutory officer. Perhaps this is the kind of situation he had in mind.

On 2 October 2022, [Government News](#) announced:

**The NSW government has created two new agencies which it says will strengthen custodianship of and access to the state’s historic collections.** Legislation for the establishment of NSW Museums of History, which will see a merger between Sydney Living Museums and the State Archives and Records Authority (SARA), passed parliament last week ... “(The legislation) will see the NSW State Archives and Sydney Living Museums brought together to create a flagship body, Museums of History NSW ...” arts minister Ben Franklin said. Museums of History NSW will be led by a CEO appointed by the minister, and guided by a board of 11 members responsible for strategic direction.

... The Act also provides for the creation of State Records NSW as a separate and dedicated agency for recordkeeping standards, regulation, advice, education and policy, with new monitoring powers to ensure good record keeping practice. Staff resources and budget will be transferred across from SARA, and a new board will be appointed.

... The [Museums of History Act 2022](#) and the State Records Act legislation will be effective from 31 December 2022.

So, in response to some of my own questions, does this imply (it’s a government announcement so comprehensibility is not its strong suit):

- There are two Acts now, but I couldn’t find an amended *State Records Act*. The amendments are in fact embedded in the new *MoH Act* (see below).
- SARA is merged, wholly or partly, into MoHNSW (but may arise like the phoenix as the new SRNSW (?))
- MoHNSW becomes the new SARA in respect of the “collection” and presumably for future accretions as new deposits are made (?)
- A new SRNSW becomes responsible for r/keeping generally (?)

The r/keeping authority established in 1998 was seamless in its jurisdiction over all state records regardless of whether they were in custody or not. It would appear that the seamless r/keeping regime is now sundered in twain but, if so, will the standards established by new SRNSW apply to the “collected” state archives as they would to any other public office or place of deposit? Obviously, these questions can only be answered after a close reading of the new legislation. Has anyone who is not a partisan of the new arrangements already done this – so I don’t have to bother? From a cursory reading of the new Act



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

- Section 23 assigns to MoHNSW “functions under the State Records Act 1998 ... (a) records management services, (b) assuming control of State records that are not currently in use, (c) recovering estrays and other State records, (d) facilitating public access to State records, (e) copying and publishing State archives, (f) exercising a right of the Crown as the owner of copyright subsisting in a State archive.” [CH: Gee, what’s left?]
- Schedule 4 (Amendment of State Records Act 1998) has replaced MoHNSW for Archives Authority Pt.4(5) and made other changes to the definitions that need close analysis in conjunction with the 1998 Act (which is still, for the moment, available online apparently unamended - grab it while you can) and there is a new section 5 (Application of Act to State Collecting Institutions) stating, inter alia, that “If a provision of this Act would otherwise require Museums of History NSW to enter into an agreement with, or obtain the consent of, Museums of History NSW, the agreement is taken to have been entered into, or the consent obtained, without further steps needing to be taken.” 5(6).

Assuming all this means (as indicated in the announcement of 2 October) that there are, in fact, now two separate authorities, it is unclear to me what the role and responsibility of State Records NSW is to be and what jurisdiction the State Records Authority, if it still exists, has over MoHNSW in respect of managing the “collection”.



**Adam Lindsay**



**John Vallance**

**2023 January 19:**

**<<Kate Curr: John Vallance was the Headmaster at Sydney Grammar, not Sydney State High, >>**

**2023 January 27:**

### **From SMH:**

The Museums of History, the Perrottet government’s newest flagship cultural institution, has been hit by two early board departures after a sudden leadership change overshadowed the organisation’s first days. *The Sydney Morning Herald* can reveal that two likely board appointees, both leading philanthropists, withdrew their names in the [aftermath of the sudden resignation of Adam Lindsay](#) – the former head of Sydney Living Museums (SLM), who had been a frontrunner to lead the new organisation ...

The Museums of History is the result of a merger of 12 museums and the state’s \$1 billion archives. Its creation on January 1 constitutes one of the state’s biggest cultural reshuffles in more than 20 years. But the museum’s board will convene with only nine of the 11 members the government confirmed, after two recent departures ...

Speaking for the first time since his temporary appointment, [State Librarian] Vallance told this masthead he had no “grand ambitions” to make the role permanent ... “One of the things I’m wanting to be careful about is to balance the need to make all the official records accessible to the public without dumbing it down – that kind of Disney-fication you see around the world,” he said ...



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

All this takes me back to my time in Victoria around about 1990 when they tried to merge PROV into what I think was called something like Archival Heritage (establishing or bringing on board some glitzy functions – including a proposal for an Archives Tram - to obscure, they were too insubstantial to submerge, the State's archival programme because they were finding the r/keeping functions uncomfortable). If I'm hazy it's because almost all hint of its existence, and the controversy that surrounded it, is invisible on the Internet. You can find a most obscure reference to it on LinkedIn,



**Loretta Hambly**

### **Loretta Hambly**

Victorian Government - various positions 1983 - 1991 · 8 yrs 1983 – 1991  
Keeper of Public Records - Requested by Minister to introduce a 'new culture and charter' for the Public Records Office ...



**Jock Phillips**

When this failed, PROV was linked administratively with a unit brought across from the Arts Department responsible for municipal library funding. I made oblique reference to all this in one of my [presentations](#)

Meanwhile, the statutory position of Keeper was occupied by acting arrangements for the next two years before it was finally filled just before the 1992 election

but you will find no reference to this episode (that I could find) in PROV's [authorised history](#). I hope the hard copy Annual Reports survive for that period to give at least a sanitised version of this sorry tale but [digitised copies](#) only seem available from 2007/2008.

A similarly obscure episode occurred to me when I was in New Zealand and they tried (ultimately without success) to merge National Archives NZ (as it then was) into a Heritage Group along with a [Dictionary of Biography](#), an [Encyclopedia](#), and other odds and sods. There's also very little evidence for this online -

### **Jock Phillips**

... Moving to the [Department of Internal Affairs](#) in 1989, Phillips was Chief Historian (1989–1997 and 2000–2002) and General Manager, Heritage (Acting) (1997–2000) ...

***To lose one Archives to Heritage, Mr Hurley, may be regarded as a misfortune – but to lose two looks like carelessness (John Cross)***

**2023, April 26:**

Just caught up with these [foreshadowed changes](#) to the management arrangements for NSW State Records, now submerged, alas, within Museums of History.





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

The State Library of New South Wales's state librarian and chief executive has signalled he will retire ... Dr John Vallance, who served as principal of the prestigious Sydney Grammar School for almost two decades before the Liberal government appointed him to one of the state's most senior public service positions, told library staff in an email dated 14 February that he would leave "sometime in July or August" to concentrate "on my own work". The email also said his interim position as acting CEO of Museums of History, the new flagship cultural institution created by the Perrottet government, was concluding in June "and there is no plan to extend that" ...

Easy to miss because the article is about something else entirely (viz. SLNSW staff anger over acquisition of Jacinta Price portrait by controversial artist).

You will recall that Vallance was made acting CEO of Museums of History after the resignation of Adam Lindsay (then head of Sydney Living Museums) who was expected to be appointed to the newly created position.



### **Neglect, Decay, Efficiency Cuts, and Some New Funding**

**2022, September 16: Neglecting Libraries & Archives**

*"History is the most dangerous product which the chemistry of the mind has concocted. Its properties are well known. It produces dreams and drunkenness. It fills people with false memories, exaggerates their reactions, exacerbates old grievances, torments them in their repose, and encourages either a delirium of grandeur or a delusion of persecution. It makes whole nations bitter, arrogant, insufferable and vainglorious." [Paul Valery](#)*

An odd piece of writing in SMH this morning entitled **The real 'history war' is the attack on our libraries and archives** by Michelle Arrow and Frank Bongiorno.

#### **Chronic under-funding:**

Fair enough. Neglect and "efficiency" cuts are a woeful and depressing tale. Many years ago, while at PROV I was so fed up that I substituted the phrase efficiency cuts for the politically correct "efficiency savings" in a ministerial submission. To my surprise and delight it went all the way to the top before someone spotted it and rebuked me for it.

*... Our national cultural institutions are threadbare, worn thin by decades of funding cuts, reductions in staff, and disintegrating buildings. They no longer have sufficient staffing and funds either to preserve, or to make accessible, the collections that they maintain on behalf of us all. Labor's introduction of so-called "efficiency dividends" in the late 1980s laid the foundations for the present crisis, but the Coalition inflicted deeper funding cuts over the past decade...*

#### **Mis-allocation of resources:**

AWM redevelopment; 'nuf said. But woe betide the GLAM-orous when they become involved in the debate over how resources are to be allocated across the sector (as between one federal institution or programme and another, as between State and Federal, as between Government and Community).

*While the National Library has been unable to repair its roof, there is bipartisan political support for an unnecessary and extravagant extension to the Australian War Memorial, which will cost more than \$500 million (and counting).*

#### **Ideology or neglect?**

The argument then becomes weird. The article seems to be linking these funding issues with what the authors portray as the ideological obsessions of the Coalition (throwing in some sniping about climate change for good measure). But they make clear (correctly) that Labor is just as much to blame for the chronic under-funding. So, is the indifference ideologically motivated or what?





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

*For Scott Morrison, Tony Abbott and their ministers, Australian history was a tool in a larger political project to stifle dissent and insist on a single legitimate point of view – their own... [The decay] is the result of decades of underfunding and a casual, negligent attitude to cultural heritage on the part of too many governments*

### **Or is it a great, post-truth conspiracy to make “war” on history?**

Do we really want to endorse the idea that there is good history and bad history? Good science and bad science? News and fake news? Are these concepts useful in the search for truth or do we accept Valery's view that history is merely a "[mechanism](#) for denying or rationalising away the relevance, significance or importance of opposing evidence or logical argument."

*History wars were part of an attempt to paint historians as out of step with the community, or even as enemies of the nation. Yet as the tide washes out on the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison era, it is clear that the real history war is the long war on our libraries and archives. Its full effects are only now hitting home...Scratch a tyrant or bully, and you'll usually also scratch someone producing, or sponsoring, fake history of some kind or doing their best to erase those parts of the past that don't suit their purposes in the present....*

### **Why does it matter?**

Almost parenthetically, an argument is made (weakly, I thought) for why these cultural materials, in the original, matter – or should matter. But it is unclear (to me) whether the authors really think it only matters until they are digitised. The linkage between preserving original evidence and upholding freedom seems to be based on the rather too comfortable assumption that truth and enlightenment follow the study of the past.

*Special collections are the jewel in the crown of any library. They are one-off manuscript materials, unique and invaluable. We cannot understand the history of Australia without them. We must all be able to have confidence that they are safe in the institutions our governments have established, with our consent and money, to care for them...Most of this material is not digitised; researchers cannot simply move their work online. If researchers cannot consult original documents, with their own questions to answer, historical understanding stagnates. It should be a matter for national shame that it has been allowed to come to this...It is among the duties of government to secure Australians' democratic right to their cultural heritage and to their own people's stories...Our prime minister promised to end the climate wars. Let's hope he is equally committed to ending the war on history.*

### **2022, September 18:**

**<<Mark Brogan: Do we have a war on history or a war on memory? I think we have a war on memory. Systematic neglect or destruction of recorded memory creates the cognitive foundations of tabula rasa, where false memory can be embedded and perception shaped. Sadly, in terms of the modified two-party system we have in Australia, the war on memory is bi-partisan and expanding.>>**

### **2022, September 24:**

Efficiency cuts are only part of the problem, but I am reminded by [this article](#) of the most intelligent thing I ever heard said by a consultant. Over the years, I've endured more reviews than most and this one was in NZ where we were enjoying a brief honeymoon in the first years of the newly elected Labour Government (they spell it with a “U” over there).

They'd approved a new building for Auckland at the political level but we still had to go through the Budget approval process. This involved preparing a Business Case for Cabinet and we contracted to have this done for us by consultants who were (we were told) experienced in navigating through the approval process. The consultants looked us over and said:

*With these Business Cases, Finance usually requires that we look for offsets to trade against new expenditure and this involves looking at activities that can be given up*



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

or done more inexpensively. But in your case, the greatest part of the money you spend doesn't go on making things happen but on preventing things from happening, so there's really nothing to look at.



Of course, Archives NZ was (and for all I know still is) poor as a church mouse to start with so there wasn't much left over after running the buildings and just keeping the place open. But I found this insight (after all the nonsense I'd heard from other consultants over the years, to say nothing of accountants) very refreshing.

### **Accounting vs. Economic Cost**

- **Accounting costs** involve explicit historical costs. They attempt to use the same rules for different firms, so we can compare firm performance.
- **Economic costs** are based on making decisions. These costs can be both **implicit** and explicit.
  - » A chief example is that economic costs include the *opportunity costs of owner-supplied resources* such as time and money, which are implicit costs.
  - » **Economic Profit** =  

$$\text{Total Revenues} - \text{Explicit Costs} - \text{Implicit Costs}$$
  - » Both explicit and implicit costs make economic profit lower than accounting profit

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**PS.** It was only when I became involved in management that I began to appreciate the difference between accountants and economists. Regrettably, small-ticket items like archives only get to deal with accountants.

**2022, December 29:**

### Beautiful icons?

*<<... Our national cultural institutions are threadbare, worn thin by decades of funding cuts, reductions in staff, and disintegrating buildings. They no longer have sufficient staffing and funds either to preserve, or to make accessible, the collections that they maintain on behalf of us all. Labor's introduction of so-called "efficiency dividends" in the late 1980s laid the foundations for the present crisis, but the Coalition inflicted deeper funding cuts over the past decade...>>*

*Library budgets are constantly being cut; in New York, Mayor Eric Adams has proposed draconian, multimillion-dollar year-over-year reductions to the public library system's operating costs, the kind of drastic withdrawals of support that will inevitably force some locations to close...The public library makes a proposition that's still radical: that learning, knowledge and curiosity are for everyone, and that the annals of history, literature, science and art might not be just an indulgence of the privileged, but an entitlement of citizenship.*

We are not alone.



<<... Almost parenthetically, an argument is made (weakly, I thought) for why these cultural materials, in the original, matter – or should matter. But it is unclear (to me) whether the authors really think it only matters until they are digitised. >>

Place vs accessibility? Availability vs monumentalism? Conservation vs contextualisation? Should contracting resources be assigned to upholding archives, galleries, museums, and libraries as places of resort or to programmes for making them more available? For the time being at least, it's both of course (until the unlikely day when everything is digitised or, at least, all that matters). But that glib response simply pushes the question on to the one about what proportion of contracting resources should be assigned to each.

If access to our collected heritage is “an entitlement of citizenship”, how if the majority of citizens aren't interested? As Sir Humphrey Appleby once remarked, it's important to know that they are **there**: *It is not to be given to what the people want: it is for what the people don't want but ought to have!*

Many years ago, in the days of B&W television, in one episode of an ABC Arts programme the host was showing a modernist painting that was totally black. The artistry, apparently, lay in the shading that the artist had used. Seemingly without any sense of drollery, the host was saying earnestly: *I only wish you could see this in colour*. Don't know what made me think of that.

**2022, December 31:**

### New national cultural policy announced

*[Arts Minister Tony] Burke revealed details of a new national cultural policy, to be released on 30 January ... The policy has five pillars: to put “First Nations first”, find a “place for every story”, ensure the “centrality of the artist”, “reach the audience” and ensure “strong institutions”. Burke said funding for collecting institutions such as the national museum, gallery and archives, and Trove will not be contained in the policy, promising “major decisions” to correct “systematic underfunding” but suggesting these would wait until the budget.*

This foreshadows that a “new national cultural policy”, insofar as it applies to “collecting institutions such as the national museum, gallery and archives”, will continue to be federal not national. The vast area of archival activity undertaken by state, local, and non-government bodies will remain outside the scope of federal funding. The Commonwealth's focus will, it seems, still be on those few programmes for which it is responsible directly - not national at all. This can, of course, be defended on the grounds that the Constitution does not assign such a responsibility to the Commonwealth Government. But, when it wants to, the federal government can adopt a national rather than a federal role.

### Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs)

The Australian federal system is notable in the degree to which the national government can influence the spending and policy priorities of state and local governments. An important instrument in this is the much-used power, under section 96 of the Constitution, whereby the Commonwealth can make conditional grants of money to the state and territory governments. These have become known as specific purpose payments (SPPs) for programs in a wide range of areas. The states administer these payments which, in most cases, are subject to conditions (so-called conditionality) that the Commonwealth specifies. In 2006 07, the Commonwealth spent almost \$29 billion or about 11 per cent of Commonwealth government expenses on SPPs ... A key move by the Commonwealth ... occurred in 1923 when the Commonwealth Parliament passed the Main Roads Development Bill which granted the states money that they could use only on the development of main roads. This was the Commonwealth's first foray into the provision of SPPs that were subject to conditionality. With the failure of a Victorian High Court challenge against the legislation, SPPs became part of the Commonwealth-state financial relationship although, for many years, they were a relatively small proportion of section 96 grants. However, since the Whitlam Government's (1972 75) deliberate decision to use such grants to impose major



policy change on the states, successive Commonwealth governments have increasingly done the same ...

For the Commonwealth to say that the States should be responsible for their own recordkeeping programmes (of which the administration of state archival "collections" is just one part) would be fair enough. But this would not preclude the Commonwealth from having a national archives policy rather than a federal one whereby direct funding and/or SSPs could be used to rationalise spending on the sector rather than simply on NAA and AWM. Archivaly, having "a place for every story" would certainly seem to span state and institutional boundaries. It's just a question of mindset.

Don't hold your breath though.

**<<Adrian Cunningham: Michael Piggott has some cogent commentary on this in Honest History from a few weeks ago...>>**

And it is good to remind ourselves from time to time that the Commonwealth, through provisions in the *Archives Act*, has statutory authority to exercise "national functions" in relation to the "archival resources of the Commonwealth" under s.3(2) and 5(2)(a), as in the nation, and "other archival resources relating to Australia" under s.5(2)(b) - beyond NAA's remit to look after Commonwealth Government records. Never used, always spurned, perpetually ignored. But they're there.

**2023, January 1:**

**<<Andrew Waugh: That's considerably limited in scope. Section 2(g) specifically excludes State records from "the archival resources of the Commonwealth [consisting] of such Commonwealth records and other material as are of national significance or public interest," and section 8 explicitly states that the NAA has no power over the custody of State records. Beyond this the archival resources of the Commonwealth must satisfy a two part test (section 2). While you could read this part expansively (anything of public interest relating to the history of Australia), the wording overall would also support a more restricted reading that restricts the NAA to material that was of national importance (a well defined concept in heritage) and that concerned Australia as a whole, or the Commonwealth government specifically.>>**

**<<That's considerably limited in scope>>**

Yes, deliberately so. If, by "scope". you mean taking custody or assuming management of resources, I agree. It was designed that way to obviate the apprehensions of "competition" from other archives and libraries and, specifically (of course) the state archives programmes. NAA was not designed (in the drafting of the Act, at any rate) as a policy department; it is operational. It cannot (on that reading) be the vehicle for a national archives policy. But it can operate as an instrument for such a policy if it existed.

These provisions were intended to allow NAA to provide support and leadership of which the National Register was a specific example mentioned in the Act (never implemented, apart I'm told from sticking a label on what they already had). Other than that, my recollection is that none of us involved in the drafting expressed any clear views on what kind of national activity might be undertaken (you might search out the Second Reading Speech, which is somewhere about in cyberspace, in which some specific examples may be given).

Just off the top of my head, I would regard participation in (the now defunct ACA - Australian Council on Archives) as an example where NAA could have done more (as NLA did in fostering AACOBs in its early days) Sponsoring a federated gateway (cf. my modest proposal) would be something else along these lines. Taking a lead in surveying needs across the sector and advising the Commonwealth on funding and other initiatives at the national level could have been undertaken.





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Instead, NAA joined with the other government archives to kill off the ACA, thereby ensuring that the collective voice heard by government(s) was a lop-sided, top-heavy, and self-interested one (I refer to COFSTA). Some of the things ACA was doing before it was killed off that COFSTA continues (e.g. statistics) would certainly qualify and these provisions underpin co-operation as much as leadership. The aspiration (at least on my part and I believe others) was for NAA to be doing (or co-ordinating, or co-operating in) things nationally that no single institution or programme could. This could be helping and supporting others in doing the things they were doing anyway, possibly developing infrastructure that was necessarily collective in nature, and looking at the needs of archives broadly. NAA could plausibly argue that participating in COFSTA does all this but I can remember back to the days when NAA would only join us as an "observer" on STAG (the COFSTA's predecessor).

We drafted the functions to operate concentrically

- Most narrowly, **Commonwealth records** (for which NAA had overarching responsibility for management and/or custody)
- More broadly, **Archival resources of the Commonwealth** (for which NAA was not responsible but had a special interest because they were of national scope and significance)
- Broadest of all, **Other archival resources** (local in scope and significance but also important)

The drafting was intended to ensure that NAA could act only in a limited way in these two latter areas (and that no bean counter could ever say that cooperative or collaborative action was beyond NAA's powers) and do so without interfering in the activities of those to whom responsibility for management and custody belonged. It is, of course, the case that NAA is not obliged to act on these powers, so it is a missed opportunity rather than a dereliction. The National Register is a different matter.



I am prepared to admit that my judgement of NAA's performance of its national functions (or lack of it) may be a trifle harsh. But that was peripheral to my main point which was that if Tony Burke wanted to look at a truly national archives policy (instead of just making it a question of funding for the national institutions in the Budget) there is a basis for doing so.

**PS.** I have since come to believe that if we'd provided more aggressively for federation of the Commonwealth, Territory, and State archives programmes that could have made it harder for the amalgamations that have occurred (or been threatened) in several of our jurisdictions - cf. NSW, NT, Tas. It would never have flown back then (even if I'd thought of it) but there were subsequently a couple of attempts at joint facilities.



**2023, January 2:**

**<< We drafted the functions to operate concentrically>>**

The Explanatory Memorandum (EM) for the 1978 Bill is online. The EM for the Bill which later became the 1983 Act may also be somewhere (geez, they're hard to find) but I don't believe the sections on "national functions" changed materially (but I am open to correction on this because I haven't checked the wording of the 1978 Bill against the 1983 Act)

Clause 3: (contd)

Under sub-clause (2), the "archival resources of the Commonwealth" are defined to include Commonwealth records and other material – except for exempt material" or material more properly the concern of other Governments – which are of national significance or public interest. It will be a function of the Archives to encourage and foster the preservation of all of the archival resources of the Commonwealth and to take into its custody that part of the archival resources of the Commonwealth which it is its function to preserve and maintain. A wide definition of the "archival resources of the Commonwealth" has been proposed because of the difficulty of defining – in legal terms – the differences between the areas of operation of the Archives and those of other custodial institutions concerned with collecting and preserving the same kinds of material (e.g. libraries and museums) whose collecting policies in the past have sometimes resulted in the deposit of official records out of official custody. It is intended that the Australian Archives established by this legislation should assume a national responsibility for developing and encouraging the preservation of all archival materials in Australia without in any way interfering with the autonomy of other archival or custodial institutions. It is not intended that the Archives will seek to have the custody and management of archival material which is more properly the concern of other institutions. By law, the Archives will be limited in this respect to material which is essentially of national or Commonwealth concern and as a matter of policy it will confine itself to material which is closely associated with the operation of Government and therefore likely to include or be related to records deposited with the Archives by Commonwealth institutions.

Clause 5:

Sub-clause (2) outlines the functions of the Archives which are as follows: Under sub-clause 5(2)(a), the Archives is responsible for ensuring the conservation and preservation of the archival resources of the Commonwealth, which are its special concern. In the exercise of this responsibility the Archives need not take into custody all material that is part of the archival resources of the Commonwealth provided it is satisfied that the material is being or can be adequately preserved or is more properly housed elsewhere. Under sub-claus 5(3)(b), the Archives is given a wider responsibility to encourage and foster, by offering advice and other assistance, the preservation of other archival resources relating to Australia which, while not part of the archival resources relating to Australia, it is nevertheless in the national interest to have preserved. It will not be the Archives role to seek the custody of such material but to advise on its preservation and, as requested, assist other institutions for that purpose.

Interesting that when I wrote that I had not yet acquired a repugnance for "collecting" and "custodialism" and also how very physical our view of archiving was back then.

**<<John Waddingham: The explanatory memorandum for the 1983 Act.>>**

**2023, January 7:**

**From the Guardian**

*The future of Trove, the National Library of Australia's expansive public digital archives, is in doubt with just six months funding left, with the library's director general revealing that it is facing "very, very big decisions" in the next few months, if the government does not step in with funding ... Last week, the arts minister, Tony Burke, publicly indicated that Trove's future will not be addressed in the federal government's new cultural policy, which will be announced on 30 January ... The National Library and its Trove service is one of six national Canberra-based cultural institutions that have been struggling to do more with less over a period of more than three decades, when the government introduced the concept*



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

*of efficiency dividends to government-funding bodies in the late 1980s ... In his address last Friday, Burke said there was “a lot of outcry at the moment and justified outcry” about funding of Canberra’s collecting institutions, saying it was due to “systematic underfunding that has happened for a long period of time”. “There will be major decisions that the government will take in dealing with those challenges,” he said.*

### 2023, January 20:

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese [has thrown a lifeline](#) to Australia’s national cultural institutions, bluntly acknowledging the financial crisis facing our largest galleries and museums and telling ABC radio listeners that some are currently “starved of funds”. “We will deal with this as part of our budget processes,” he said this week, when pressed about ongoing concerns for organisations like the National Gallery of Australia (NGA), the National Library of Australia (NLA) and the National Film and Sound Archive ...

Perhaps NAA shouldn’t get excited about being over-looked in this list. After all, it’s “going to be hard” for the Government and the only thing being promised, after all, is “consideration”. The last time I looked, consideration costs a government nothing. If they are going to make hard promises to actually do something, perhaps they’ll wait to the last year of this term of government. Then it will be an election promise and we know all about those. But they could still be in office for two terms ... maybe the last year of their second term.

[The PM continued] “this is something that the government will give consideration to in the lead-up to the May budget.” ... [Last July] arts minister Tony Burke was frank about the problem stating institutions like this had [suffered from a “decade of neglect”](#). But he also said it was “going to be hard” to adequately address everyone’s concerns given broader budgetary pressures.

If they are serious about “addressing” everyone’s concerns, surely the place to start would be the promised National Arts Policy where foundational questions such as *what’s more important* would have to be “addressed”. But we’re told the Policy won’t be doing that. So, on what basis will they be “addressing” the competing claims since they can’t “adequately address everyone’s concerns”? Whoever makes the most noise? Whoever has the most influential friends? Whoever can tell the saddest tale of woe? Flip of a coin? It can’t be on a policy-based assessment of significance or worth. I wasn’t always this cynical. Really, I wasn’t. Mind you, I wouldn’t like to be the minister promulgating a policy that “addressed” relative significance and worth. Would you?

<<**David Povey: In my mind’s eye I see a CEO from the NLA or NFSA blowing their chest out, and “proudly but not arrogantly” letting the minions know that they are “being considered for enhanced funding” as soon as the forthcoming budget. As an “outward facing” CEO, this consideration by government is a significant achievement for the organisation and will almost certainly result in the enhancement of the CEO’s status. This CEO status enhancement will come at the cost of the loss of one conservator and a stay on ordering Japanese washi, subsequent on “the failure of the government to increase funding” in the May budget. Further consideration of an increase in budget for “digital services” in FY2024/5 is however a “priority for government”. The enhanced CEO has moved back to Finance where she takes up an Assistant Secretary position. That, Mr Hurley, is what is known as a “Win/Win”. (Unless you’re a conservator or need washi for urgent paper repairs).>>**

### 2023, February 25:

Richard Glover [makes a plea](#) to save Trove

The funding for Trove runs out at the end of June. The National Library says that without additional funding, they “will need to cease offering the Trove service entirely.” ... Trove is crucial for professional historians, but it’s also a trapdoor through which anyone can tumble and learn something new. Try it yourself and see why it so desperately needs to be saved.



**2023, March 10:**

Wondering what the contending parties in NSW have in mind after the forthcoming election for the Arts sector (within which, to my great disgust, official recordkeeping seems to have been submerged)? You won't be able to find out much (at least I couldn't).

- **Liberals** are mostly on about performing arts, museums, facilities, sport, and the fish market (god-save-us-all!).
- **Labor** will “take a whole-of-government approach” [say again?], moving focus “beyond the major cultural institutions in the city’s east to the broader creative businesses right across the city”, and charting a “path to growth for the sector which does not rely solely on public sector funding and support.” [And they say they’re opposed to privatisation].
- **Nationals** “support funding local art groups to encourage diversity, expression of culture, exploration of the latest ideas and to help with the attraction of performances.”
- **Greens** will “invest a greater share of the arts budget on regional and rural arts and on First Nations art ” (Note: nothing is said about r/keeping in a separate section on Democracy, Ant-Corruption & Integrity).
- **One Nation** .... Hard to say but possibly “Abolishing all forms of political indoctrination in NSW education, especially transgender ideology and Critical Race Theory” or “abolishing woke-PC programs and employment quotas in the NSW public sector, putting these funds into improved hospital services around the State.”
- **Shooters & Fishers** ... also hard to say: they “respect common sense in the execution of our rights and truth in government” and they “honour our Australian way of life including our ancient heritage, western culture, and pluralistic democracy” (and accessibility to fireworks).

Nothing that I could find that suggests any concern with recordkeeping, standards, accountability, etc. or an understanding of or concern with integrity (apart from fatuous platitudes or the Greens drooling over ICAC, political donations, and other hot-buttons) nor with the connection between integrity and r/keeping. To the extent that it is (or was) a professional objective of ours to get this on the political radar, we haven't done so well (it seems to me). Reviewing the recent scandals, it seems that when r/keeping comes in at all we are locked into the role of being pawns in gotcha-moment sensations that quickly fade and do nothing to cement abiding notions of support for routine good practice.

For those of a more mercenary bent, I could find nothing about funding except for suggestions of moving money away from established institutions. I'm all for expanding state support towards non-government and community archives but I fear this is more about glitz than substance.

**PS** For the sake of tidiness: I overlooked the Animal Justice Party which holds “positions” on issues that aren't animal-related. They have positions on

- **Corruption** : supports “the efforts of integrity and accountability agencies that oversee our democratic processes”
- **Democracy** : supports “the rule of law, the principle of responsible government, and the separation of powers”

*When I mount the scaffold at last these will be my farewell words to the sheriff:  
Say what you will against me when I am gone, but don't forget to add,  
in common justice, that I was never converted to anything. H L Menken*





**2023, March 11:**

Perhaps the state of government recordkeeping in NSW is so excellent that there is no need for political parties to have a policy or even to mention it any more. Political commitment to integrity in recordkeeping is now a given in the Premier State, is it?. In that case, if it's so uncontroversial, why shouldn't ASA and RIMPA get together and use that excellence as the basis for developing a model recordkeeping policy to assist parties of all persuasions in ALL jurisdictions (Commonwealth, State, and Territory). Look at NSW! If they can do it there, why not everywhere? Saves you the trouble of thinking it through or arguing about it. Here you go, just subscribe to this model policy that commits you to upholding the same superb levels of accountability they've reached in NSW. What!? You won't do that? Well, what does that say about you?

Be proactive. Go to them. Go for them. Don't wait for them to come to us. Lots of other interest groups do that. Why not us? Come to think of it, giving them all a model government recordkeeping policy might not be such a bad idea even if the NSW integrity model isn't all it's cracked up to be. Why wait for the politicians to tell us what they're prepared to do? Why not tell them what we expect them to do?

A lot of attention has been given to "[integrity agencies](#)" in NSW – independence, funding, role, powers and responsibilities. The records authorities would not ordinarily be regarded as one of them (because recordkeepers don't have an enforcement role and standard-setters cannot be auditors) but they have been periodically recognised as ancillary – [poor recordkeeping attracts corruption like flies to a carcass](#). And so, a model government r/keeping policy would make that connection and ask political parties to commit to some of the same guarantees for the r/keeping mechanisms.

But all that would require some kind of consensus on our part as a profession (are we still that?) about what a model r/keeping policy for government ought to look like – a consensus that would be doubly difficult to recognise when tangled up in an Arts Policy. But, first things first, could we even get agreement amongst ourselves? I once thought so.

**2023, March 24:**

It seems a pity, if archives & records **must** be lumped in with the Arts, that NAA doesn't even get a mention in [an article](#) like this:

... The [NGA's] lifts need urgent replacing, the roof membrane and skylights leak in a downpour, and the air-conditioning is clapped out. Some \$265 million in urgent repairs are needed to bring the 40-year-old building up to standard. Come July the gallery is facing a looming budget cliff ... Unless a funding solution can be found, the gallery has warned it will need to cut staff, some 50 positions over three years, close its doors two days a week and possibly impose ticketed entry. The National Library of Australia, the nation's repository of the published word, has been caught in the same financial crunch and has a building also in need of multimillion-dollar investment. Funding for its digital resource, Trove, runs out on June 30 and without additional government support the popular archive could cease operations altogether ...

"Governments have stonewalled these institutions for years and Anthony Albanese and Tony Burke need to show some sensitivity to these huge issues despite the competing claims for government money," says former arts administrator Michael Lynch. "One of those idiot submarines would fix all the dilemmas of the national institutions and generate a huge amount of interest in what they can do. Where is the advocacy for these institutions?" ... investment in federal cultural institutions has been half-hearted, inconsistent and of a drip-feed nature with serious consequences for the ability of these bodies to weather economic storms, [former Australian Film Finance Commission and Foxtel boss Kim Williams] says. Williams blames a prejudice, what others might call a consequence of the culture wars, in which spending on the arts has been cast as an elitist pursuit.



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Hmmm? Trading off forward defence for cultural survival. Let the arts thrive within fortress Australia. The only thing we have to worry about then is civil war of a cultural kind. Seriously?

... The NGA's particular struggles date to the late 1980s when national collecting institutions became subject to public service-wide annual savings cuts, known as an annual efficiency dividend. The Rudd government imposed an additional 2 per cent efficiency dividend on the institutions soon after it came to office, forcing savings of close to \$20 million to be found by the collecting institutions. The Rudd impost was temporary, but soon after it returned to its previous level, the Abbott government ramped the dividend up again, doubling it from 1.25 per cent to 2.5 per cent in its brutal first budget and keeping it there for five years ... Months before its 2022 election loss, the Morrison government commissioned KPMG to review the financial sustainability of all cultural institutions. The findings have never been released but are said to paint a dire picture of financial distress. The think tank, A New Approach, funded by 11 philanthropic foundations, found a 4.9 per cent decline in arts and cultural funding in the 10 years to 2017 for each Australian across three tiers of government, with a marked 18.9 per cent decline in federal spending.

It would be great to know if these metrics include the cultural aspects of r/keeping. Probably not. How depressing – to be regarded as cultural collections and then not counted.

Budgets have likely worsened since then, says Williams. “The so-called efficiency dividend would have done its dirty work, and more, and inflation has cut in so it's been a full-frontal attack on the intellectual and creative life in Australia ... The efficiency dividend must go because the majority of costs in these areas of endeavour are in people and therefore the efficiency dividend basically says you have to do the same amount of stuff with fewer people.” [Former arts administrator Michael Lynch] agrees there is no place for efficiency dividends in the funding mix for the NGA or any national cultural institution. “It's a bullshit concept,” he says ...

Professor Peter Stanley, who worked at the Australian War Memorial for 27 years and then spent six years at the National Museum, says the collecting institutions face three challenges: the cumulative impact of efficiency dividends, the need to spend money on buildings falling into disrepair and the competing need to spend money to keep growing their visitor numbers ... “All of them are fearful that if their visitor numbers, physical and digital, fall that they won't be worth funding. In order to meet those expectations, they take money away from their fundamental research and preservation roles ... Stanley says there is an unjustified imbalance in funding ANZAC commemoration, militarism and the War Memorial that “demonstrates Australians don't look at their history and culture in an equitable way”.

I suppose that in a climate of crisis it can't be expected that there would be useful debate over prioritisation for funding within the Arts sector, even one so parochial as funding for federal programmes merely. Probably just as well because I can't see us doing well in such a debate, even if we were considered at all.

Former arts minister Paul Fletcher has consistently defended the Coalition's record while being quick to point out that Labor has had two opportunities to fix these budget issues, most recently when it launched its National Cultural Policy. For his part, Albanese has acknowledged the national galleries and museums have been “starved of funds”, and has blamed “a decade of neglect”. Burke has assured the leaders of collecting institutions the government is listening.

So, that's all right then.

Now for a feel-good story. Apologies if this is not news for you but that's no reason not to feel good about it anyway. When I travel down to Sydney I try to spend a few hours at [SMSA Library](#). Sometimes I go down just for that (and an opportunity to visit Abbey's Book Shop). I like reading the newspapers and journals I don't subscribe to myself, like [The Oldie](#). They have just celebrated their 190th anniversary. How about that!



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

How this place keeps going I have no idea but I'm glad it does. Makes up for neglect in other spaces. The Melbourne equivalent is the [Atheneum Library](#) to which I belonged when I lived there. The [mechanics' institutes](#) were once a big deal and to be found all over.



### **2023, March 30:**

Once again, NAA misses out on both [cash](#) and [recognition](#) as a “national cultural institution”. Perhaps because they’re a federal cultural institution, and not a national one. Or, perhaps because they're selling themselves as something else now when all that culture seems to get is Mr Burke's "consideration". I suppose it doesn't matter much if *The Guardian* doesn't include them amongst "Australia's national cultural institutions" but I am pleased they're not listed amongst "the country's national collecting agencies" - unless, of course, that's how they wish to see themselves now. in which case they have my sympathy. As I read the national cultural policy, it's national in focus and not federal, so maybe NAA has no hope there either. The words, of course, aren't important until perception becomes reality.

The Australian War Memorial received more funding than the rest of Australia’s national cultural institutions put together, in the last two years of the Coalition government ... The Australian War Memorial is undergoing a major refurbishment, with \$500m allocated by the Morrison government, topped up with a further \$50m in March 2022 ... Over the same time, the country’s national collecting agencies – **the National Gallery of Australia, the National Library of Australia, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Museum of Australia, the Australian Maritime Museum and the National Film and Sound Archive** – collectively received \$400m from the Coalition government, as efficiency dividends saw budgets slashed over successive years. The national collecting institutions were not included in the \$300m national cultural policy [announced by the arts minister, Tony Burke](#), in January.

Burke indicated at the time that additional support for the national cultural institutions was being considered for the May budget ...

### **2023, April 1:**

**<<It seems a pity, if archives & records must be lumped in with the Arts, that NAA doesn’t even get a mention in [an article like this](#)>>**

Perhaps this is why.

I came across this [2022 Report](#) from an outfit calling itself the [Office of the Arts](#) (D. of Infrastructure, Transport, Communications and the Arts) – no Oxford comma. It measures (or claims to measure) the “impact of our national cultural institutions”. It provides lots of juicy metrics and has no hesitation in proclaiming which institutions they are:

#### **The National Cultural Institutions are:**

- [Australian National Maritime Museum](#)
- [Bundanon Trust](#)
- [The Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House](#)
- [National Film and Sound Archive of Australia](#)



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

- [The National Gallery of Australia](#)
- [The National Library of Australia](#)
- [The National Museum of Australia](#)
- [The National Portrait Gallery](#)
- [The Australia Council for the Arts](#)
- [The Australian Film, Television and Radio School](#)
- [Screen Australia](#)

By which, of course, they mean the federally funded ones and not, for example, the [National Gallery of Victoria](#), the [Australian Museum](#), et al. It seems an odd mix of doers and collectors. I'm all for metrics but these metrics seem to be a little bit crazy. How can you combine data from all these programmes and the different institutions (and the diverse materials in which they deal) to aggregate figures for the number of "objects" held, available, displayed, digitised, etc. How can you compare visits to these institutions and other activities undertaken in relation to performance, paintings, museum objects, books, film, photos, sound recordings, etc., etc., as if they're all just things with like properties?

This has the smell of a bureaucracy in search of a purpose. I don't wish to sound unkind but, if Mr Burke is looking for money to fund the institutions, he might start by abolishing this lot and using the money saved to mend the [Gallery's roof](#). Maybe he wouldn't then have to give up a nuclear submarine to pay for it (as some well-meaning idiot has suggested).

### 2023, April 3:

Somewhere, in the dark recesses of their minds, I imagine the politicians and mandarins who have been inflicting "efficiency savings" on our cultural institutions must see a connection between budget cuts and improved productivity. Of course, the cuts always seem to come **before** the improved productivity, just as coal and gas are being dispensed with **before** the green infrastructure is ready to replace it. Ah well! It's an insane world.

*Hope springs eternal in the human breast; Man never is but always To be blest.  
The soul, uneasy, and confin'd from home, rests and expiates in a life to come* ([Pope](#)).

Thus [Ross Gittins](#) last Saturday:

The Productivity Commission's five-yearly report on our productivity performance ... has one important thing to tell us: ... productivity improvement has slowed [and] it will probably stay slow ... Everyone thinks they know what productivity means, but they often don't ... The report says that over the past 20 years, the rate of improvement in productivity has slowed in all the rich countries, but with Australia slowing more than most ... most improvements in the productivity of labour come from advances in technology [and] giving workers more education and training ...

... industries that produce *goods* ... can, and have, hugely increase[d] their productivity by mechanising and computerising. Same in utilities, transport and communications. In the production of *services*, however, it's much harder ... As [Baumol](#) famously remarked, it takes an orchestra just as long to play a symphony today as it did in 1960 – or 1860 ... Which means the productivity of labour is sky-high in the goods sector, but not great in the services sector ... Despite their low productivity, employers in the services sector have to pay higher wages to stop their workers moving to higher-paying jobs in the goods sector ... in rich, high-productivity economies such as ours, labour is the more expensive resource, and capital the less expensive resource ...

So, maybe the real problem for us is that we are on the "services" side of the equation and productivity improvement is harder for us to achieve. Mind you, with privatisation, most of government now is services (how unlike the doers of the colonial pioneering days when government did things). Many government agencies endure a few years of efficiency and then morph into something else and begin the dance all over again, but our cultural





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

institutions endure and just get smaller and smaller but never seem to disappear (just as in [Zeno's paradox](#)).

I haven't read the detail of this week's announcement about new funding for Trove. Is it to be one-off or recurrent? Does it pay for systems and capital or for people to keep it going? Governments find it more palatable to put money into buildings and capital than paying the staff needed to make use of them.

### **2023, April 4:**

<<**Mike Jones:** The Trove funding announced is \$33 million over the next four years, then from 2027 \$9.2 million ongoing indexed funding after that. The library has said that this will "will allow the National Library to continue to provide this essential service, enrich it with new content, and stabilise and secure the platform, in line with the Trove Strategy" but the specifics around how it will be spent, what is allocated to people versus technology is as far as I know still to be determined. It's also not clear whether the NLA more broadly is going to get a funding boost to deal with staffing issues, building works, and so on. It's interesting to note that, though several arts organisations were excluded from the efficiency dividend as part of the latest arts and culture policy, at this stage the NLA and other national institutions (including NAA as far as I am aware) are still subject to this. Finance Minister Katy Gallagher has come out this week and confirmed that Labor remains committed to the efficiency dividend for 'properly funded' institutions, which makes one wonder whether, after the latest push back up the hill, we will once again find ourselves sliding slowly back toward the bottom. I guess we'll know more after the May budget.>>

#### **Lifeline for Trove**

- **Is it to be one-off or recurrent?**

... The pre-budget announcement on Monday pledged [\$33m] emergency funding over the next four years ... plus an additional \$9.2m in ongoing annual funding ...

- **Does it pay for systems and capital or for people to keep it going?**

*"... the Government is ... committing to providing \$9.2 million in indexed ongoing annual funding beyond the forward estimates ... This funding is consistent with the Government's commitment in [Revive](#), our national cultural policy, to support our national collecting institutions to digitise and provide broad public access to their collections."* [Hon Tony Burke MP](#)

Interesting that, [contrary to earlier indications](#), the Minister is now coupling funding for core business in at least one of the national collections with the National Cultural Policy. But "consistent with" is scarcely a reversal of the former position. They've provided \$199m over four years for "greater strategic oversight and engagement" and some money for outreach by the National Gallery (but not as yet a new roof).

### **2023 April 6:**

<< **I came across this 2022 Report from an outfit calling itself the Office of the Arts (D. of Infrastructure, Transport, Communications and the Arts) – no Oxford comma.** >>

This interesting website has other rewarding pages, like [this one](#) which claims to reveal the level of "government cultural funding and participation" across the nation and in each State and Territory.

- In 2020–21, the estimate of total expenditure on cultural activities, funded by the three tiers of government, was \$7,708.0m. This amount includes \$514.4m of targeted COVID support funding for cultural and creative organisations and infrastructure, businesses, individuals, support programs and initiatives. The Australian Government targeted COVID support funding was \$232.6m, and State and territory government targeted COVID support



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

funding was \$281.8m. The \$7,708.0m in funding for cultural activities from the three tiers of government comprised:

- \$2,967.0m (39% of total) from the Australian Government
- \$2,955.2m (38%) from state and territory governments
- \$1,785.8m (23%) from local governments.
- The Australian Government allocated more than double the funding to Arts activities, compared to Heritage activities (72% and 28% respectively). The five categories with the highest expenditure by the Australian Government in 2020–21 was:
  1. Radio and television services—\$1,418.1m
  2. Other museums and cultural heritage—\$482.9m
  3. Film and video production and distribution—\$159.8m
  4. Archives—\$140.7m
  5. Music—\$132.4m.
- The five categories with the highest expenditure by State and territory government in 2020–21 was:
  2. Other museums and cultural heritage—\$505.5m
  3. Libraries—\$451.6m
  4. Art museums—\$414.0m
  5. Arts education—\$176.2m.

### 2023, April 10:

They said it. [From SMH](#)

Sydney’s musicians, galleries, museums, restaurants and theatres will be at the forefront of a new national and global tourism rebrand as the Minns government takes its lead from federal Labor and commits to “bringing cultural vibrancy back to NSW”.

The state’s tourism pitch to international and interstate visitors will shift focus from the icons of the harbour, Bondi Beach and Sydney Opera House to experience-based tourism under the watch of incoming Arts and Tourism Minister John Graham. “As soon as you do that, tourism becomes an arts and culture story,” Graham told *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

NSW will also get its own arts and cultural policy by year’s end, similar to that launched by the Albanese government in January ...



Graham, who also manages the roads’ portfolio, spearheaded a parliamentary inquiry into the state’s music and arts economy post-introduction of lockdown laws, and like federal minister, Tony Burke, is known as a strong advocate for live music ... Labor’s pre-election promises on arts and culture were relatively modest but targeted: matching \$160 million in funding to upgrade three western Sydney arts venues ... and a pledge to spend \$103 million to double the number of suburban and regional live music venues in four years ... The new minister met with the leaders of cultural institutions and Destination NSW, the government’s tourism agency, the day before Cabinet’s formal swearing-in last week.

The state’s aspirations for arts and culture had been set too low, he said, and Labor would seek to broaden traditional definitions to include creative industries such as gaming, design, and architecture ...

*Tourist dollars are where the arts are, and my arts are experience-based.*

### 2023, April 20:

Budgets out of control, bulk billing all but dead, NDIS ripped off and dysfunctional, policy mismatches (e.g. immigration/population “policies” vs infrastructure), energy security in peril, defence needs outstripping resources, flashy short-term fixes vs boring long-term



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

hard-slog, policy decisions to “save” health, education, and aged care by funding for more trained staff who simply don’t exist, etc. etc. etc. What hope have cultural institutions (whichever they are) for reparative or even sustainable funding in this situation, with their long-term agendas and needs? Well, we have one abiding competitive advantage – we are so small by comparison that we make no difference one way or the other re the biggies.

Think of budgets as Venn Diagrams or representations of planetary space. The big blobs are health, education, welfare, transport, defence and so on. Our (diminishing) share is like a tiny moon drifting across the surface of Jupiter. Unfortunately, this also means that our needs never make it to the high table where the big decisions are made – our needs will be referred to a sub-committee. But there are more profound (and more depressing) lessons to be learned from a consideration of how big government works. Here is an analysis of some of the reasons the US (and its allies including Australia) failed in Afghanistan: reasons that point to the pattern in which complex democracies fail on many fronts and with which any thinking middle-level manager, still working or from retirement, will be familiar.

... [in 2005-2008] the effort was under-resourced. Iraq was the principal reason why ... But another problem - one more endemic to Washington’s culture of warfare – had to do with how funding decisions are made and how slowly the American government is able to change course ... when funds are available departments are urged to spend quickly to clear the books; when requesting funds, the justifications and paperwork to get what one needs will seem without end ... the process of budget allocation and management in Washington was disconnected from operations in the field ... By 2007, the coalition was losing the war ... President Bush in mid-February [promised] funding ... The problem was that budgeting procedures were simply too slow to have the necessary effect ... [his speech] contained major increases in economic aid and a giant jump in security funding [for which the author of this analysis and colleagues on the ground had been arguing for years with a growing sense of urgency] ... But funding only began to reach the field toward the end of the year ... once the funds arrived, they came with demands to spend quickly, which led to the flawed decisions and inadequate oversight. Tripling the funds in an account can happen with the stroke of a pen; expanding programs responsibly is far more complex ... [remember our own [home insulation programme](#)] ...

This feast-or-famine quality ... is yet another attribute of how Washington goes to war, and it stretches far beyond Afghanistan [add the Trump factor and this is a truly frightening conclusion for a close ally]. As George F Kennan once famously explained ... The United States ... is like a “*prehistoric monster with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin; he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath – in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed; but once he grasps this he lays about him with such blind determination that he not only destroys his adversary, but largely wrecks his native habitat.*” This is what happened in Afghanistan in 2007; but the tool the dinosaur ... used was not its teeth or its tail – it was its credit card.

Ronald E Neumann “Washington goes to war” in [Our Latest Longest War](#) (2017) edited by Aaron B O’Connell (pp.55-58)

When I was new to management, I made the fatal error of believing what I was told when I asked how to get budget requests through. Eventually, I reached the only sane conclusions:

- Don’t believe that the obstacles put in your way are reasons, they are pretexts.
- Don’t believe that logic or sense will win an argument - when you confront them with facts they can’t refute, they will turn away with a pained expression and start talking about something else.
- Never underestimate their capacity to avoid doing what they don’t want to do and their ingenuity in not doing it.
- Never suppose that a decision in your favour will come with the support you need to make it work.
- Never assume that the powers that be have brains.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

- Never believe that you are operating in an orderly and integrated environment (unless you're Victorian and your head-of-government is named Andrews who, we are told, has tentacles everywhere).

**PS.** For what it's worth, here are three other life-lessons I've learned:

- Never eat on anything that moves or floats.
- Never embark upon a land war in Asia.
- Never let the bastards get you down.

**2023, April 27:**

### **Culture Clash ("history is boring")**

On the other hand, they could love you to death .... When lamenting government neglect of publicly funded GLAM collections, it might do to be careful what we wish for. The continuing controversy over the Powerhouse Museum – its relocation to Parramatta and a refocus away from its “traditional” role (the Powerhouse dropped ‘museum’ from its name in February this year) – might not be about cost-cutting after all, according to some insiders, but rather about losing your soul by appealing to a Government’s wish to use its cultural assets to support tourism and to appear glitzy and “with it” (how that phrase dates me). Familiar territory for critics of the AWM extravaganza.

Staff and former board members at Sydney’s Powerhouse allege the museum’s collections have been neglected and put at risk of damage, as Australia’s flagship science and technology museum undergoes a controversial \$500m conversion into a commercially driven creative arts and events space [alleging] that objects in the museum had been placed at risk during major modifications to exhibition spaces and at parties and events held at the site ...

The Powerhouse’s new direction – fashion and design over science and technology, and moving away from the family market – is well under way. Its current exhibitions include Unpopular, about the 1990s alternative music scene; a Carla Zampatti fashion retrospective; an exhibition featuring new Australian designers; and Absolutely Queer, which shines a spotlight on Sydney’s leading LGBTQI+ creatives. While the former power station in Ultimo became home to the Museum of Applied Arts and Science’s extensive science and technology collection 35 years ago, the Powerhouse no longer has a curator of transport and engineering, or aviation. In February, “museum” was formally dropped from the institution’s title ...

Questioned in budget estimates last September, the Powerhouse’s chief executive since 2019, Lisa Havilah, put forward a business case for the Ultimo and Parramatta operations combined at \$38.8m in commercial revenue per annum by 2028 – \$10m more than the National Gallery of Victoria, which is currently the most visited museum in Australia. Kylie Winkworth, who sits on the board of the National Trust (NSW) and is a member of the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, a group fighting to save the Ultimo site as a museum, said she believed the business case showed that the museum’s management and trust no longer regarded the Powerhouse as a public museum and it had already transitioned into a “commercially focused events business with some museum exhibitions fitted in around gaps”...

A survey of Powerhouse staff completed in late 2022 found that two-thirds of respondents believed the museum was no longer providing a good experience to visitors ... with more than two-thirds of staff saying they believed no action would be taken by management on the survey results. The Powerhouse spokesperson said a presentation was provided to all staff “identifying priority areas to address and areas of improvement” after the survey results came out, and a new position of employee experience manager had been created ... “All the performance metrics indicate that the [Powerhouse] museum’s focus on creative industries, fashion and design is a recipe for fewer exhibitions of limited appeal, declining visitors and collapsing education outcomes,” Winkworth said ...

[An] anonymous former Powerhouse employee [said] they believed “there has been a major focus on the latest, the hippest, the fashionable. The core audiences of family, schools and older visitors have been mostly neglected. Long-term dedicated, professional staff have been ignored and sometimes scorned.” [alleging further] that, in the years up to the end of 2018, they had personally heard members of “the past and current executive” who publicly supported the





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

decision to move the museum, make comments in private including “most of the collection is uninteresting”, “history is boring”, “community consultation is a waste of time; we’re just ticking the boxes” and “we’ll use the Boulton and Watt engine to run a designer brewery” ...

*The state’s aspirations for arts and culture had been set too low, he said,  
and Labor would seek to broaden traditional definitions  
to include creative industries such as gaming, design, and architecture ...*

Incoming NSW Arts and Tourism Minister, John Graham.

**<<Never eat on anything that moves or floats. Never embark upon a  
land war in Asia. Never let the bastards get you down.>>**

And here’s another piece of practical advice resulting from an unfortunate experience in the laundry just this afternoon-

Always check for face-masks before running your clothes through the machine.

### **2023, April 28:**

The ASA has usefully gathered together [media releases](#) from six national (i.e. federal) cultural collections who have benefitted from a pre-Budget announcement of increased funding of \$535.3 million (over four years, so no more whining until after the next election) and this is in addition to the rescue package for Trove. Have you ever known so many pre-Budget announcements? In summary-

- **NAA** (\$36.5m) *preservation and digitisation ... advancing data and cataloguing systems.*
- **National Film & Sound Archive** (\$unspecified) *digitisation and accessibility*
- **National Library** (\$unspecified) *core operations, building maintenance, expanded storage*
- **National Museum** (\$78.3m) *operations, capital works, increased storage*
- **Museum of Australian Democracy** (\$37.9m) *building works, historical interpretation, collections, exhibitions and digital engagement programs*
- **National Gallery** (\$119.1m) *operational issues and capital works*

The \$535.3 million goes to **nine** “National Collecting Institutions” (as is made clear in the release on the Gallery’s website). The other three are: Australian National Maritime Museum, Bundanon Trust, and the National Portrait Gallery of Australia.

### **2023, April 29:**

What [they said](#) about it all [**my emphases**]. The Albanese Labor Government will

- secure the future of Australia’s most cherished cultural and historical institutions ...
- restoring them as a **source of national pride** ...
- guarantee **ongoing, indexed funding** ...
- establish **clear line of sight** over future capital works and improvements ...
- ensure Australia has a **strong cultural infrastructure** - which is a key pillar of *Revive*, the Government’s new National Cultural Policy ...

These institutions ... play an important role in **truth-telling for First Nations** people and in fostering international cultural exchange.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said:

... 'These are special places ...

They **preserve, protect and celebrate** Australia’s stories  
and history ...





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Arts Minister Tony Burke said:



... Government delivers strong core funding  
and **philanthropists** take them to the next level [???

Minister for Finance and Senator for ACT Katy Gallagher, said:

... The Institutions are often the gateway  
to **attracting visitors to the Canberra region**

... and are a key driver of the ACT economy,  
so this funding will ensure local jobs and the tourism  
sector are supported into the future ...

**[Ah! How gratifying - she's able to be  
“national” and parochial in the same breath.]**



National Gallery Council Chair, Ryan Stokes AO added:



... The National Gallery is home to **the most valuable  
collection of art in Australia** and the world's largest  
collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

There you have it: pride, sustainability, truth-telling, partnerships, Canberra-tourism, triumphalism. I'll have to go back and read [Revive](#) more closely to see where it says that a “strong cultural infrastructure - which is a key pillar of *Revive*, the Government's new National Cultural Policy” specifies that supporting the federal institutions financially (but not others around the nation) was intended. To be fair, the Maritime Museum is located in Sydney, so that's all right then - not parochial at all.

### **Pillar 4 [Strong Cultural Infrastructure] begins-**

These institutions are spread across all tiers of government, the not-for-profit sector and private/commercial sectors, as well as embedded within geographic, cultural, professional and social communities. [so far, so good but that doesn't mean what you might think]. The centrepiece of the National Cultural Policy will be establishing Creative Australia (a restored and expanded Australia Council for the Arts) ...

- **Actions (p.70)** : ... address underfunded areas like youth arts ... establishment of a dedicated First Nations-led Board to invest in, create and produce, from 2024, First Nations works of scale ... develop a First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy, and promote best practice cultural protocols, self-determination and cultural safety training across arts and cultural organisations ... establishment of Music Australia, to support the Australian music industry to grow ... establishment of Writers Australia to provide direct support to the literature sector ... establish a Poet Laureate for Australia ... provide advice on issues of pay, safety and welfare in the arts and culture sector ... investment in a works of scale fund, to support the commissioning of new Australian artistic works of scale.



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

- **Actions (p.72):** ... a triennial State of Australian Culture Survey ... intergovernmental meetings between Commonwealth, state and territory cultural ministers, and the Australian Local Government Association ... research on the national qualitative, quantitative and economic impact of music festivals ... Update the methodology used in the Australian Bureau of Statistics Cultural and Creative Activity Satellite Accounts to better capture the contribution of the cultural and creative sector ...
- **Actions (p.74):** ... create synergies between public and private partnerships, as well as government and philanthropic investment ... incentivise philanthropic support for the arts ... support more small and medium arts organisations and drive the development of new artistic works of scale.
- **Actions (p.77):** [**my underlining**] Share the national collection by establishing a program of long-term loans of works from the National Gallery of Australia's collection to regional and suburban cultural institutions across Australia ... Digitise at-risk First Nations cultural material to preserve them for future generations

... Update **Significance 2.0** : a guide to assessing the significance of collection (first published in 2001) to help collecting organisations and professionals and the broader public to determine the significance of cultural and heritage objects

... Modernise the **Archives Act 1983** to enhance the National Archives of Australia's ability to manage government records and information that reflects the digital age ... Modernise the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986, to streamline and simplify processes for the protection of both Australian and foreign movable cultural heritage.

**2023, May 3:**

What is the ethos of recordkeeping? To celebrate or to plod? How do we make ourselves valued? Is good r/keeping about maintaining well-ordered systems or uncovering sensational failings? Is good archiving about more (or less) than benign festivity, tourism, pride, celebration, entertainment, triumphalism, and cultural virtue?



**Why did it take so long for mainstream media to pick up the Post Office scandal?**

### **Systems aren't sexy**

... no matter how often they are restated (far from often enough), the details of the Post Office scandal are so incredible as to be almost literally impossible to believe. Put as sparsely as possible, **736 subpostmasters and postmistresses** were prosecuted for theft, fraud and false accounting in their branches, between 2000 and 2014. Yet they had done nothing wrong, The fault was with a new computer system designed by Fujitsu and forced on to them by Post Office management – a system that top brass allegedly knew was faulty ... People's lives were ruined ... Many were imprisoned ... Tech was trusted over humans with unblemished records. As things stand, more than a year into the belated inquiry, not a single person has been held to legal account





## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

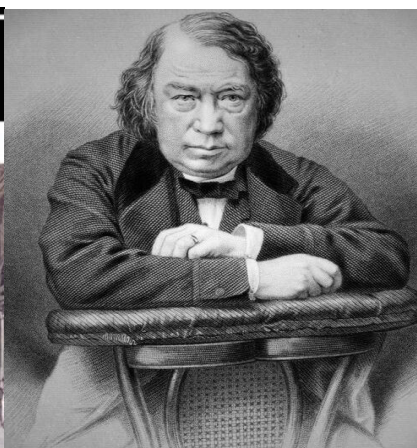
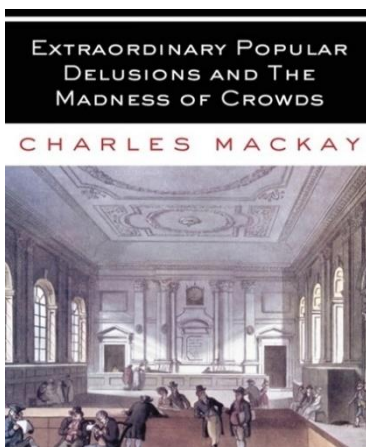
... The grim saga rumbles on, with comparatively little coverage given its scale and significance ... [59 of the victims have died](#) before the end of the inquiry, while some victims were only allocated [£1,000 in legal aid](#). The Post Office has spent £100m on City lawyers.

But you have to wonder whether the Post Office story is somehow not sexy enough for much of a chatterati who prefer their scandals to unfold over a feverish day on Elon Musk's platform, and not in unloved inquiry rooms ... Alas, the Post Office scandal has never truly seemed to stir the souls of those who regard a day spent online dragging this or that user as activism well spent ... I appreciate it is far, far more difficult to "cancel" the iniquitous systems that led to the Post Office horror than it is to "cancel" someone in public life who you think has said something unacceptable – but it does very much need doing ... Getting caught up in endless cycles of "calling out" might work to punish individuals for their individual infractions, but it doesn't change the bigger, more significant problems, and anyone who thinks it does is kidding themselves.

Is sensationalism a conspiracy? I don't think so. It's about laziness and cultural vacuity (too many virtues, perhaps, rather than not enough).

Or allowing themselves to be kidded by people who have a vested interest in them not changing things. I know some politicians and some pundits bang on disparagingly about the "woke mind virus" or whatever, but I often think they must be secretly thrilled with the virtue games ... It really couldn't suit them more. How much better to have people sidelined into endless 24- or 48-hour online meltdowns, in which they are either pitted against one another litigating the narcissism of small differences – the dream! – or obsessing about one person's transgressions and leaving iniquitous and dysfunctional systems free to sail on regardless ... My theory is that if you give people absolutely no economic power, they will use what little power they have to lash out in one way or another, and it's pretty hard to blame them for that ... I don't believe that getting angry on [Twitter](#) particularly helps ... or that sitting in judgment on every passing infraction is anything other than a hiding to nothing. It is not effecting change – it is the illusion of effecting change ...

I'm sorry, but the idea that [wokeism](#) is a capitalist conspiracy strikes me as far-fetched. It is defined as sensitivity "to social and political injustice". This author is clearly sensitive to an injustice and therefore, by definition, woke - but that does not make her the dupe of capitalism. A better understanding of the nature and sources of popular sensitivities would derive from a reading of [Charles Mackay](#).



People, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one.  
– Charles Mackay

Her gripe is that not enough people share her sensitivity on her issue and focus instead on trivial sensationalism. But she would not have a gripe if her sensitivities were popular. Our gripe is that not enough people value archives (for the right reasons). Not sure we agree amongst ourselves what the right reasons are but, in any case, what can we (should we) do about that? Go on plodding or try to be more popular (assuming we could figure out how)? Or just keep on complaining? We cannot kid ourselves that how we present our archives doesn't influence how they are understood and perceived and so, unavoidably, we must choose a pathway to achieving our particular mission: [rationalism](#), [empiricism](#), or [argumentum ad populum](#)?



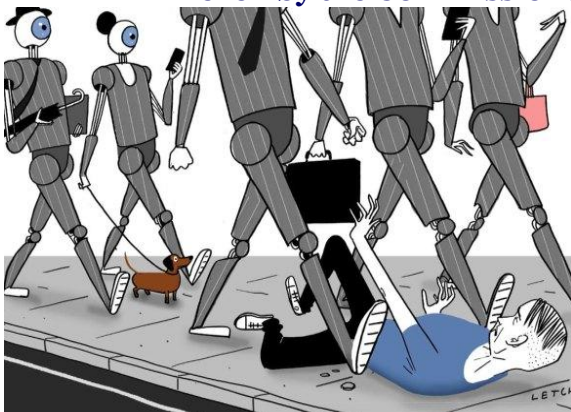


## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Perhaps worthiness (dull but safe) is the way to go. And claiming to uphold democracy doesn't hurt, I suppose.

<<**Andrew Waugh:** Well, the journalist is right about one thing. The description of the (British) Post Office scandal is correct, and IMHO it is indeed a scandal. The management of the British Post Office prosecuted and had imprisoned its own subagents for fraud when the problem was the inaccuracies of its own accounting system. In prosecuting the agents, the Post Office relied on a legal principle that a computer system doing the job it was developed for would be assumed to be working correctly. The person accused of fraud, in this case, had to first prove that the system wasn't working correctly. Of course, they had no access to the internal evidence about the system's accuracy. Joseph Heller invented a term for this trap. Internally, the Post Office knew full well that the system was NOT operating correctly. A longer, and very interesting, analysis can be found in the Digital Evidence and Electronic Signature Law Review. In essence, it is very similar to the Robodebt and Windrush scandals. One thing that has been noted about the Robodebt scandal, even by the Commissioner, is how little society cares. Only a few activists pushed for an investigation. Even during the public investigation, when the public servants and politicians concerned were making the most damning admissions, they were largely ignored by journalists and editors. This is essentially the point the journalist here is expressing about the Post Office scandal. For some reason, these maladministration scandals are not considered newsworthy. And it's worth asking why not.>>

<< One thing that has been noted about the Robodebt scandal, even by the Commissioner, is how little society cares. >>



And I think you could say much the same of the Banking Royal Commission.

<<**Andrew Waugh:** Incidentally, the referenced paper has quite a lot to say about records and recordkeeping. Consider this quote...

One of the possibly surprising features of these miscarriages of justice is that, in almost all cases, the only evidence against the defendant in question was an alleged 'shortfall' shown in the Horizon computer system –computer printouts, if you will. If you remember only one thing from this talk, bear in mind that writing on a bit of paper in evidence is only marks on a piece of paper until first, someone explains what it means and, second, if it is a statement of fact, someone proves the truth of that fact. The simplest explanation for the Post Office scandal is that documents generated by the Horizon computer system were routinely treated by lawyers and judges as though statements of fact that were true, without bothering to consider how their veracity should be established. It was taken as given that what a computer record showed was correct. The shallowness of this approach, at all levels, is seriously reprehensible.>>

<<without bothering to consider how their veracity should be established>>

Anyone who has been involved in private sector corporate recordkeeping knows this to be true. In discovery, dealings with regulators, and in presenting written evidence to



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

commissions of inquiry, the corporation must attest that the documents are authentic and accurate. Even tightly controlled regulatory systems (some, not all) often focus on what needs to be kept rather than on how it is to be kept. Corporate recordkeeping is often in such disarray that the documentary “evidence” has to be reconstructed from dubious caches found in left-over storage scattered about in disaggregated systems. In the case of discovery, some hapless individual has to attest, on behalf of the corporation, that the documents are a true and accurate record – knowing full well how unreliable the sources are and hoping they won’t be challenged. And they aren’t because content (not context) turns out to be king after all.

Bearman once predicted that r/keeping would come into its own when lawyers began testing the veracity of digital documentary evidence and expert witnesses (like us) could [tear them to shreds](#). But it hasn’t happened.



**Two years after the banking royal commission, memories are fading and momentum is falling for Kenneth Hayne's fix**

**2024, July 7**

<<1 Apr., 2023: I came across this [2022 Report](#) from an outfit calling itself the [Office of the Arts](#) (D. of Infrastructure, Transport, Communications and the Arts) – no Oxford comma. It measures (or claims to measure) the “impact of our national cultural institutions”. It provides lots of juicy metrics and has no hesitation in proclaiming which institutions they are ... By which, of course, they mean the federally funded ones and not, for example, the [National Gallery of Victoria](#), the [Australian Museum](#), et al. It seems an odd mix of doers and collectors. I’m all for metrics but these metrics seem to be a little bit crazy. How can you combine data from all these programmes and the different institutions (and the diverse materials in which they deal) to aggregate figures for the number of “objects” held, available, displayed, digitised, etc. How can you compare visits to these institutions and other activities undertaken in relation to performance, paintings, museum objects, books, film, photos, sound recordings, etc., etc., as if they’re all just things with like properties?>>

April Fool’s day one year ago found me thinking ruefully about metrics and how to measure what we do. I have been steaming all weekend, watching Sky News (UK) and BBC pundits



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

squealing about a sea-change in British politics with a landslide win for Labour. It was all a mirage and a cautionary tale about how careful one has to be with numbers.

In 2019, Labour (under Corbyn) received [32.2% of the popular vote](#) whereas last weekend (under Starmer) they [received 33.9%](#).

For all practical purposes, support for British Labour hasn't moved at all over the intervening period. In terms of what the British people voted for, the only proper conclusion is that in 2024 two-thirds of them (of the ones that actually turned out) don't want Labour. The Conservative vote in 2019 was 43.6%; so, by the same token, a majority didn't want a Johnson/Truss/Sunak government either. The weekend's so-called "*landslide*" is tosh: Labour's 2024 "*landslide*" electoral victory and their 2019 "*catastrophic*" electoral defeat were both achieved without any significant movement in the number of people voting for them. The two largest non-Labour parties this time (Conservative and Reform) achieved 37.9%, somewhat less than the 43.6% the Conservatives got in 2019 but still 4% higher than Labour in 2024. The result in seats is because of Britain's peculiar first-past-the-post system. Not to say Labour would not have won under proportional voting, but who knows.



Most democratic governments (including ours here) are elected on a minority of votes cast. This makes talk of "*the people's will*" and "*our mandate*" just political blather in almost every case because the numbers tell us that a majority of people have almost always voted for someone else as their preferred choice. This was most obvious (and most annoying) with the way the UK's Brexit vote was represented as "*the people of Britain have voted to leave*". They voted for no such thing. There was only a two-thirds turnout and the YES/NO votes were very nearly equal. The only truthful way of describing that result was to say that one-third voted to go, one-third voted to stay, and the remaining third were slobes and didn't vote at all.

So, what is the most useful way to provide metrics in our field? Is there, in fact, any viable way of counting us in with GLAM and providing valid measures of what we do? Is anyone even trying to do so?

**2024, July 8**

**<<a cautionary tale about how careful one has to be with numbers>>**

It didn't take long for someone to point out to me that my account of the 2016 Brexit vote wasn't strictly accurate. OK. So [here are the figures](#):

- Turnout: 72.2%
- Leave: 51.9%
- Remain: 48.1%

Of course, these numbers don't invalidate the result. The Leave victory was legit. As [Churchill remarked](#) – *the worst form of government, except for all of the others*.





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

Losing advocates here for constitutional change sometimes lament (and suggest changes to) our referendum requirements, but the results have the merit of actually reflecting the popular will, given that Australians are compelled to turn out, like it or not. And, despite our reputation for rugged individualism, most of us do.

**2024, July 20**

**<< The result in seats is because of Britain's peculiar first-past-the-post system.>>**

I have just laid aside my copy of A J P Taylor's [\*English History 1914-1945\*](#) which I was using to cross-check information in another book I am reading. I was chastened to come across his strictures in the Preface against use of the term "Britain":

The use of 'England' except for a geographic area brings protests, especially from the Scotch\*. They seek to impose 'Britain' – the name of a Roman province which perished in the fifth century and which included none of Scotland nor, indeed, all of England. I never use this incorrect term, though it is sometimes slipped past me by sub-editors. 'Great Britain' is correct and has been since 1707. It is not, however, synonymous with the United Kingdom, as the Scotch, forgetting the Irish (or, since 1922, the Northern Irish), seem to think. Again, the United Kingdom does not cover the Commonwealth, the colonial empire, or India. Whatever word we use lands us in a tangle.

\* The inhabitants of Scotland now call themselves 'Scots' and their affairs 'Scottish'. They are entitled to do so. The English word for both is 'Scotch', just as we call les français the French, and Deutschland Germany. Being English, I use it.

This all sounds insufferably pedantic, but I am sure it was written with a twinkle.

**2024, July 27:**

**<<8 July, 2024: Losing advocates here for constitutional change sometimes lament (and suggest changes to) our referendum requirements, but the results have the merit of actually reflecting the popular will, given that Australians are compelled to turn out, like it or not. And, despite our reputation for rugged individualism, most of us do.>>**

A paean to the [\*merits of compulsory voting\*](#) appears under Paul Strangio's name in *The Conversation*. It's only when you see the silliness of an outcome based on the 52% turnout in the recent UK election and the shonkiness of US voting practices (State-based, gerrymandered, and politically corrupted) that you begin to appreciate our system (with all its faults) and the blessing we have in the AEC (with all of its faults).

Numbers (taken with a healthy dose of critical thinking) are the fact-based antidote to wishful thinking. But few of us are properly trained in their use. Instead, they are often used simply to support a point of view (lies, damned lies, and statistics). Even more depressing is when people don't even care if the metrics support them; they just go on believing what they want to believe anyway and go on (mis)using them to uphold a position.

**<<1 April, 2023: It seems an odd mix of doers and collectors.  
I'm all for metrics but these metrics seem to be a little bit crazy.  
How can you combine data from all these programmes and the  
different institutions (and the diverse materials in which they deal)  
to aggregate figures for the number of "objects" held, available, displayed,  
digitised, etc. How can you compare visits to these institutions and  
other activities undertaken in relation to performance, paintings,  
museum objects, books, film, photos, sound recordings, etc., etc.,  
as if they're all just things with like properties?>>**

**PS.** I'm told my strictures about poor voter turnout are misleading because the votes of those who don't turnout would "probably" break along the same lines as the votes of those





who do and that pre-election opinion polling supports this. I'm a believer in opinion polling but that's not how we elect governments.

**2024, July 29**

<<20 Jan., 2023: If they are serious about "addressing" everyone's concerns, surely the place to start would be the promised National Arts Policy where foundational questions such as what's more important would have to be "addressed". But we're told the Policy won't be doing that. So, on what basis will they be "addressing" the competing claims since they can't "adequately address everyone's concerns"? Whoever makes the most noise? Whoever has the most influential friends? Whoever can tell the saddest tale of woe? Flip of a coin? It can't be on a policy-based assessment of significance or worth. I wasn't always this cynical. Really, I wasn't. Mind you, I wouldn't like to be the minister promulgating a policy that "addressed" relative significance and worth. Would you?>>

Bubbling along in the shadows, the [Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications](#) is examining the Government's National Arts Policy (*Revive*), allegedly aimed at **reviving** the Cultural Sector. Submissions have closed but they keep asking for extensions of time. It's beginning to look like they won't finish before the next election. Unsurprisingly, even in this quiet backwater there are ripples of partisan conflict. There is an [Interim Report](#) (May, 2024), not much to it but with these [Dissenting Comments](#) from Coalition Senators:

The main impact of the much-hyped National Cultural Policy in practice has been to fund and employ additional bureaucrats. This has delivered few observable benefits to Australian artists and creatives and those wishing to see Australian performers, as evidenced by submissions to this committee.

Sceptics could have said that before Day 1 of the Committee's hearings, about this and about many other Commonwealth Government initiatives. It's a long, long way up from the ground to the dizzying heights of high-minded policy-making in Canberra.

<<**David Povey**: In my mind's eye I see a CEO from the NLA or NFSA blowing their chest out, and "proudly but not arrogantly" letting the minions know that they are "being considered for enhanced funding" as soon as the forthcoming budget. As an "outward facing" CEO, this consideration by government is a significant achievement for the organisation and will almost certainly result in the enhancement of the CEO's status. This CEO status enhancement will come at the cost of the loss of one conservator and a stay on ordering Japanese washi, subsequent on "the failure of the government to increase funding" in the May budget. Further consideration of an increase in budget for "digital services" in FY2024/5 is however a "priority for government". The enhanced CEO has moved back to Finance where she takes up an Assistant Secretary position. That, Mr Hurley, is what is known as a "Win/Win". (Unless you're a conservator or need washi for urgent paper repairs).>>

**2024, August 1:**

<<**Andrew Waugh**, 3 May, 2023: Incidentally, the referenced paper has quite a lot to say about records and recordkeeping. Consider this quote...

... bear in mind that writing on a bit of paper in evidence is only marks on a piece of paper until first, someone explains what it means and, second, if it is a statement of fact, someone proves the truth of that fact. The simplest explanation for the Post Office scandal is that documents generated by the Horizon computer system were routinely treated by lawyers and judges as though statements of fact that were true, without bothering to consider how their veracity should be established ...>>

<<**CH**: ... In discovery, dealings with regulators, and in presenting written evidence to commissions of inquiry, the corporation must attest that the documents are authentic



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

and accurate. Even tightly controlled regulatory systems (some, not all) often focus on what needs to be kept rather than on how it is to be kept. Corporate recordkeeping is often in such disarray that the documentary “evidence” has to be reconstructed from dubious caches found in left-over storage scattered about in disaggregated systems ... some hapless individual has to attest, on behalf of the corporation, that the documents are a true and accurate record – knowing full well how unreliable the sources are and hoping they won’t be challenged. And they aren’t because content (not context) turns out to be king after all.>>

### **E-Discovery (2011)**

*Another case management strategy discussed in the Consultation Paper was the use of discovery masters. This could be, for example, an industry expert who would consider technical e-discovery issues and report to the Court with recommendations for case management ... some stakeholders saw the potential for expert attention to achieve greater efficiencies in discovery in some cases.*

**<<Bearman once predicted that r/keeping would come into its own when lawyers began testing the veracity of digital documentary evidence and expert witnesses (like us) could tear them to shreds. But it hasn’t happened.>>**

I wonder if we r/keepers would still be up for the role.

*A number of submissions pointed out that the parties’ documents need to be sufficiently well organised and managed in order to facilitate a reasonable and proportionate discovery process. The ALRC heard from a number of stakeholders that many litigants do not have effective record management systems in place. One stakeholder proposed that the Federal Court should introduce requirements on the parties to adopt record management systems. Such reform would have broader implications—outside of the courts system—for the day-to-day operation of business.*

I once attended a conference on discovery. An organiser asked me what I thought. I said it was like attending two different conferences. Thus, one set of speakers:

*When you receive a discovery order, your records will be in a mess and you’ll have difficulty. This is how to handle it.*

Thus, the other set of speakers:

*This is how you have to manage your records in order to avoid difficulty when you receive a discovery order.*

So it goes.

### **Joanna Sassoon:**

And in the context of the question as to whether copies of records are true and accurate, suggest reading this paper [Trusting the copies?](#) Historical photographs and native title claims.

### **2024, August 13:**

**<<27 July, 2024: PS. I’m told my strictures about poor voter turnout are misleading because the votes of those who don’t turnout would “probably” break along the same lines as the votes of those who do and that pre-election opinion polling supports this. I’m a believer in opinion polling but that’s not how we elect governments.>>**

### **On the other hand:**

... As turnout approaches 90%, significant differences between voters and nonvoters lessen, but in lower turnout elections the differences between voters and nonvoters can be dramatic. More importantly than changes in specific election outcomes, voter turnout has seismic long-term implications on the abilities of democracies to function. For example, [regulatory capture](#) tends to afflict low-turnout democracies more ...



And, as always, [knowing what we don't know](#) is important:

... The global decline in voter turnout has occurred in parallel with the emergence of many negative voices about the state of democracy around the world. Diamond (2015: 152) argues that: 'low rates of voter participation are additional signs of democratic ill-health'. Given the importance of elections to democracy, the issue of voter participation should be taken more seriously by election stakeholders ... As this report briefly highlights, a multitude of factors affect voter turnout and these factors appear in complex combinations ... the collection of voter participation data by election authorities must be improved. The disaggregation of officially reported voter turnout data by gender, age, ethnicity, level of education and other key characteristics of voters would identify variations in turnout among various groups of the population. Strategies and the actions to be taken to encourage voter participation can then be better focused, and targeted at the specific problems identified by the analyses of such data.

### 2024, August 29:

**<<27 July, 2024: Numbers (taken with a healthy dose of critical thinking) are the fact-based antidote to wishful thinking. But few of us are properly trained in their use. Instead, they are often used simply to support a point of view (lies, damned lies, and statistics). Even more depressing is when people don't even care if the metrics support them; they just go on believing what they want to believe anyway and go on (mis)using them to uphold a position.>>**

I sometimes wonder if our politicians even listen to what they themselves are saying. What is the difference between “social cohesion” and Doublespeak? There's a [kerfuffle](#) going on about whether to include questions about sexuality/identity in the next Census. What intrigues and disgusts me is the [rationale](#) offered by our Deputy PM for excluding them:

The acting prime minister, Richard Marles, says the government decided not to add questions on sexuality to the 2026 census to avoid “divisive” community debates. Marles said the government had opted to take the existing set of questions to the next census rather than adding five new topics – including sexuality – as had been proposed, out of concern for social cohesion. “We are doing that because we do not want to open up divisive debates in the community now,” Marles told journalists on Wednesday.

### [Doublespeak](#)

is language that deliberately obscures, disguises, distorts, or reverses the meaning of words. Doublespeak may take the form of euphemisms (e.g., “downsizing” for layoffs and “servicing the target” for bombing), in which case it is primarily meant to make the truth sound more palatable. It may also refer to intentional ambiguity in language or to actual inversions of meaning. In such cases, doublespeak disguises the nature of the truth. Doublespeak is most closely associated with political language.

Another example with which our community is very familiar is “efficiency savings” to mean “budget cuts”.

Disagreements over Welcome to Country are [condemned](#) by the Virtuous as “offensive and hurtful”. When I was a lad, being described as *inoffensive* was an insult. How comes it about that it is now seen as a virtue? Suppression or shaming of unwelcome opinion is the very reverse of robust debate. Robust debate, however politely it is conducted, is in its essence “divisive” and “offensive”. Disagreement on the road to truth is the hallmark of a mature society. For myself, I wouldn't censor any opinion but I suppose some limits have to be accepted (reluctantly) as the price we pay to live in a safe, civilised country in which we don't murder each other.



## FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL



But ...

As archivists can we subscribe to a doctrine that suppresses the evidence itself, the metrics, the very facts that are the basis for rational conclusions, because someone will be offended? Takes us back to [Toxic Assets](#). We may moderate our descriptions of it but we still have a duty to the thing itself.

**2024, November 5:**

<<25 June, 2024: [Rimpa CEO ... on e/recordkeeping](#). **The Curse of Janus: No one believed more fervently than I that archiving and record-keeping had to come together as recordkeeping (conceptually and practically). Have our statutory archives authorities achieved that? They have not. Torn between archiving (looking back and fussing over digitisation of the old stuff) and record-keeping (looking forward and guiding good business practice in the present) we now have aspirations to demonstrate a social conscience. Three strings to our bow. It's an impossible brief. The need for unity of focus is our equivalent of [unity of command](#). Our archives authorities will say they can do it all but the tension begets the organisational equivalent of [attention deficit disorder](#).**>>

This is a bit out of date, but I can't recall seeing anything about it on this List. Across the Tasman, things have been happening. [The National Archival and Library Institutions Ministerial Group](#) has been busy for some years (since before the change of government, it seems). In a Statement issued in June 2018 Internal Affairs Minister (Tracey Martin) and the Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage (Grant Robertson) [said](#):

"While these three ... institutions (Archives NZ, National Library, and Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision) have distinct roles they have much in common, including storing and preserving physical collections, managing digital information and increasing access to information through digitisation," ... Maintaining the independence of the Chief Archivist in New Zealand's constitutional framework would be a key consideration of this work. "The Chief Archivist sets the framework for government recordkeeping and for regulating the creation and disposal of public records," Tracey Martin said. "We will specifically consider options to ensure the Chief Archivist has sufficient independence to be an effective regulator of the public sector ... The terms of reference for the work programme will be available soon on the Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage website and the Department of Internal Affairs website.

The [Terms of Reference](#) contained some interesting ideas:

The coalition Government has decided to develop policy for the contribution of New Zealand's national archival and library institutions to democratic accountability and to the culture and heritage sector, and respond to their challenges and opportunities ... New Zealand's national archival and library institutions have distinct identities and purposes. However, their work shares some strong common themes focused on:

- the collection, preservation and dissemination of knowledge;
- fostering New Zealand's cultural identity; and





## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

- responding to digital preservation challenges.

Archives NZ is led by the Chief Archivist and has a regulatory function under the Public Records Act 2005 ...

The National Library is New Zealand's legal deposit library ... The National Library also houses the collections of the Alexander Turnbull Library which is the foremost research library on New Zealand and Pacific studies ...

NTSV is New Zealand's national audiovisual archive ... [its] role includes collecting, preserving, cataloguing, providing access to and promoting public interest in audiovisual materials ...

The work plan will:

- investigate options to ensure the Chief Archivist has sufficient independence to be an effective regulator of the public sector (this will include a consideration of whether the Chief Archivist should be an Officer of Parliament, as well as comparing how other statutory officer functions retain independence);
- consider the implications and impacts including costs of ***separating the Chief Archivist's regulatory role from the management of the collections*** held by Archives NZ [**my emphasis**];

.....

The second dot point of the work plan echoes an idea I have promoted from time to time, viz. separating the regulatory role from manging the stuff (just give it all to someone else). Under that scenario, the work of the stuff-manager is regulated just like that of any other agency. It is (I have to admit) superficially not unlike the purchaser/provider split that I was unhappily part of during my time in NZ but that was a dog's breakfast and should not be taken as a guide. In May 2020, a [Report ... on the Status of the Chief Archivist](#) was released stating (inter alia)

There is no suggestion that the regulatory provisions of the PRA are deficient (except perhaps that the range of powers that must be performed independently could usefully be expanded). The problem being addressed instead concerns a lack of adequate status and authority of the office of Chief Archivist in a general sense, whether perceived or real ...

Some of the options being considered ... include the possibility of enhanced independence. Making the Chief Archivist an Officer of Parliament has been promoted as one means of addressing the need for enhanced status and authority. While attractive in a general sense, this option is not consistent with principle, and would pose significant practical difficulties ... It would also seem unworkable to make the Chief Archivist an Officer of Parliament while retaining leadership of Archives New Zealand. As a regulatory body, Archives New Zealand rightly sits within the executive branch of government ... I recommend for consideration ...:

- Recognising the constitutional significance of public recordkeeping, and the Chief Archivist's role in it, through legislative reforms to clarify and strengthen the PRA's purpose and objectives.
- Enhancing the effectiveness of the Chief Archivist's statutory reporting power, by providing more detail about its purpose and Parliament's expectations about what should be reported.

The Chief Executive ... decided [inter alia] on:

- A new National Library and Archives appropriation [to be] implemented from 1 July 2020, providing greater external transparency of the funding available to the institutions.
- The Chief Archivist and National Librarian having direct access to the Minister and Chief Executive of the Department as required.
- The Chief Archivist and National Librarian receiving tier 2 financial, HR and contract delegations meaning they can assume greater authority, consistent with their existing accountability.
- Delegated governance of routine capital spending.

.....



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

- While the consensus is that current settings cannot continue, Ministers have agreed that with this level of investment and commitment no structural changes will be made in the current term of this Government to allow the department time to implement the new measures in the context of the significant investments announced.

Does anyone know how all this has worked out over there under the new Government? Meanwhile .....

- Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga Archives New Zealand's Te Maeatanga [Digitisation programme closes](#).
- Expected to open to the public in 2026, a [new national archives facility](#) will be situated at 2-12 Aitken Street, Wellington.
- The national archive will [not have enough space](#) to store vital records even after its new \$290 million building is ready in Wellington.
- A host of [shortcomings were pinpointed in an IT overhaul](#) at Archives NZ ... The [then] new \$4 million search tool has been slow and suffered a series of complete shutdowns and breaches throughout 2022 ....

**PS.** Just so I'm not misunderstood. I am not suggesting that archiving, record-keeping, and acting on a social conscience are incompatible or that they (and much more besides) are not legitimate and worthy aspects of the archivist's work. That's not the point. The question (as I see it) is whether the totality of the archivist's mission should be the assigned responsibility of a government archives authority - or only part of that mission.

**2025, February 23:**

### **Efficiency dividends on the table ...**

Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor has not ruled out the introduction of efficiency dividends for public service departments as part of efforts to cut government jobs. Efficiency dividends have been used since 1987 as a means to financially incentivise departments to find efficiencies in government business. While Mr Taylor stopped short of detailing specific cuts, he did not rule out the possibility that efficiency dividends were on the table ... “Labor's added 36,000 Canberra-based public servants. We've said that's too many.”

The comments come as part of the opposition's broader push to trim government bureaucracy, which it argues has grown large and inefficient. The Coalition has yet to provide details on how many jobs cuts it wants but Opposition Leader Peter Dutton has said he wouldn't allow more than 200,000 public sector jobs. Shadow finance minister Jane Hume recently flagged eliminating duplicated roles across departments as a priority for improving efficiency ... The debate over government spending has factored as a major topic of debate ahead of the upcoming federal election, to be held on or before May 17.

**<<Ross Gittins: ... industries that produce goods ... can, and have, hugely increase[d] their productivity by mechanising and computerising. Same in utilities, transport and communications. In the production of services, however, it's much harder ... (March 14, 2023)>>**

**<<April 3, 2023: Somewhere, in the dark recesses of their minds, I imagine the politicians and mandarins who have been inflicting “efficiency savings” on our cultural institutions must see a connection between budget cuts and improved productivity. Of course, the cuts always seem to come before the improved productivity, just as coal and gas are being dispensed with before the green infrastructure is ready to replace it. Ah well! It's an insane world ... maybe the real problem for us is that we are on the “services” side of the equation and productivity improvement is harder for us to achieve. Mind you, with privatisation, most of government now is services (how unlike the doers of the colonial pioneering days when government did things). Many government agencies endure a few years of efficiency and then morph into something else and begin the dance all over again, but**



## **FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL**

**our cultural institutions endure and just get smaller and smaller but never seem to disappear (just as in [Zeno's paradox](#)).>>**

### **Trump revels in mass federal firings ...**

President Donald Trump said that “nobody's ever seen anything” like his administration's sweeping effort to fire thousands of federal employees and shrink the size of government, congratulating himself for “dominating” Washington and sending bureaucrats “packing.” Addressing an adoring crowd at the Conservative Political Action Conference just outside the nation's capital, Trump promised, “We’re going to forge a new and lasting political majority that will drive American politics for generations to come.” ... Trump has empowered Elon Musk to help carry out the firings, and the billionaire suggested today that more might be coming.

“Consistent with President @realDonaldTrump’s instructions, all federal employees will shortly receive an email requesting to understand what they got done last week,” Musk posted on X, which he owns. “Failure to respond will be taken as a resignation.” Later, an “HR” email was sent to federal workers across numerous agencies titled “What did you do last week” and asking that recipients “reply with approx. 5 bullets of what you accomplished last week and cc your manager.”

### **The John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Boston unexpectedly closed Tuesday after several employees were laid off.**

... A spokesperson for the JFK Library and Museum confirmed it closed at 2 p.m. Tuesday and referred GBH News to the National Archives. The National Archives Public and Media communications staff told GBH News the library and museum will reopen on Wednesday ... “It’s been chaotic, and we are seeking clarity,” said a source with knowledge of the situation. “We have been informed that a certain segment of employees have been let go. ... To our understanding, this is a part of national efforts.” ...

At 2 p.m. Tuesday, the JFK Library and Museum announced that it would be closed until further notice. A sign posted on the door of the library said the closure was “due to an Executive Order concerning a ‘reduction in force (RIF).’” The source told GBH News that staff were notified of the terminations just before that announcement. They said front desk staff were among the five people let go. “Without them, we are unable to stay open to the public until further notice,” they said ...

Say what you will about Trump/Musk, at least they don’t use weasel words like “efficiency dividend”.

**Not Neglecting, Strangling: A  
Short History of a Most  
Inefficient Policy**

Published April 19, 2023



### **The efficiency dividend has helped to destroy the formerly first-class service provision of Australia’s national cultural institutions**