



WE ARE WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE



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How we Identify

2015, June 2: Governance – data vs information?

Stimulating [article](#) from the IIM Linkedin Group comparing and contrasting data governance and information governance. Good luck trying to get precision into the use of this or any other such distinction in this area. It is, however, interesting to see how much of the territory covered by both terms (in this person's exposition anyway) encompasses what we might regard as recordkeeping turf. The thesis seems to be that data governance is about "storage and movement" and can, by implication, be left to the techos whereas information governance is about content management (use, retention, and destruction). Those interested in "information", he seems to be saying, don't need to worry about storage and movement. But when it comes to the management of evidence, especially where legacy data is concerned, surely it is impossible to see how a r/keeper could be indifferent to data governance issues set out in this article – viz. security, "lineage", synchronization, single point of reference, preventing data loss, masking sensitive data. I doubt that there will be any more disciplined use of these terms in future than there has been in the past, but if these kinds of ideas are forming behind the terminology it is a conversation we need to be part of.

Data Governance is typically an IT owned responsibility and should account for all aspects of the data – both structured and unstructured – as it relates to information storage and movement. Common areas involved in data governance include:

- [Data Security](#). Includes network and infrastructure security, encryption and physical security surrounding your data.
- Data lineage. Includes defining the system of record for various types of data, how does it move between systems, and what transformations were applied in the process.



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Determination of reconciliation processes applied during movement or transformation of data also fall within data lineage.

- Service Levels. Includes the timeliness of data delivery, data access and synchronization between multiple copies of the data.
- Master Data Management (MDM). Includes the processes, governance, policies, standards and tools that consistently define and manage the critical data of an organization to provide a single point of reference. Examples include how to identify all data belonging to a given customer.
- Data Loss Prevention (DLP). Includes applications and policies to prevent data loss and data leaks via intrusion detection, masking sensitive data, encryption of data in transit and at rest, etc.

Information Governance (IG) on the other hand is typically a business or compliance/legal driven approach to managing and controlling how all enterprise content is used, retained and destroyed. It is defined by Gartner as “the set of multi-disciplinary structures, policies, procedures, processes and controls implemented to manage information at an enterprise level, supporting an organization’s immediate and future regulatory, legal, risk, environmental and operational requirements”. On a much more practical level, the [Information Governance Initiative \(IGI\)](#) defines IG as “the activities and technologies that organizations employ to maximize the value of their information while minimizing associated risks and costs.” Including both unstructured and structured data as well, typical IG strategies and initiatives include:

- Categorization. Includes the identification of where all content (not just electronic files, but also paper, rich media, social media etc.) should be assigned based on not only business categories such as invoices, loan documents and transactions, customer correspondence, twitter feed, etc. but also its value to the organization.
- Information Lifecycle. Includes categorization of data in terms of whether it is subject to regulatory requirements (e.g. HIPAA, FINRA, SEC), PII, intellectual property, historical requirements etc. This is done in order to apply the appropriate retention to help meet compliance, privacy and/or business mandates. This process also helps to determine how long each item should be kept, when and how it should be purged, who needs to approve the disposal and the process of disposition to be utilized.
- Definition of Use. Helps to define the appropriate and inappropriate use of content, especially in the case of regulated environments such as broker dealers (e.g. what type of analytics can be used)
- Information Access. Includes the definition of a finer level of security at the file and item level. This determines who should have access to what content and helps to ensure speed of appropriate access.
- Audit and eDiscovery. Includes how best to manage investigations and response aspects of governance including the eDiscovery process, requests processing, search, preservation, notification, review processes and export.
- [Defensible disposition](#). Includes applying governance policies to remove digital debris or redundant, outdated and trivial content (ROT) from your information landscape to reduce costs and undue risk while improving search efficiencies.

Shortly after submitting the posting above (8:57am), an invitation arrived (9:53am) to a RIMPA (NSW) State Seminar. There will be a paper entitled:

“Transformation from Records Management to Information Governance”

Spooky. Here’s the blurb :

Life used to be simple – information was very well structured, lived in a handful of well-managed repositories and the lifecycle of information was straightforward. Over the last decade companies have amassed vast quantities of business information, stored in across content management systems, physical warehouses, desktops, file shares, mobile devices, and now cloud based services. To complicate matters, information is also scattered across jurisdictions and business units – each with its own requirements, laws, and regulations. Today, executives are beginning to understand the need to evolve their organization’s records management program into global information governance. Although many organizations recognize they need



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to establish and implement an information governance program that's defensible in the courts and audit, the challenge of actually doing it seems difficult, so for them, progressing to information governance is deferred. Topics covered in this session include:

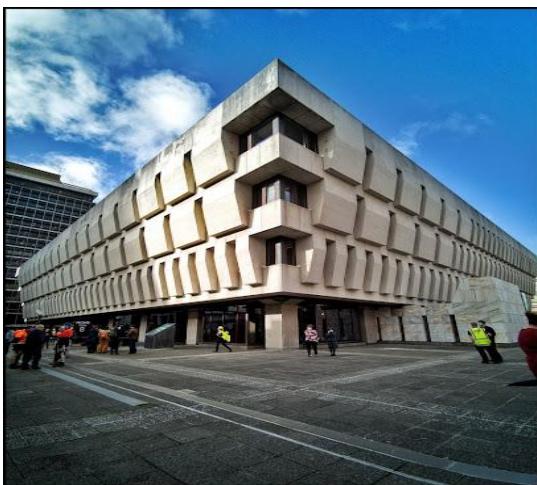
- Understanding how Information Governance programs and drivers will change the methodology used by our practitioners today.
- Accelerating information governance initiatives by transforming an existing records management program into information governance.
- Touch on the skills sets practitioners will require in this new era and how they will become more influential in their roles and organizations.
- Discussing the business drivers and technical challenges of enforcing information governance policy across disparate content repositories (cloud-based, on-premise, physical).
- Understanding the impact of multiple jurisdictions on an information governance program.
- Selling information governance to other stakeholders including IT, compliance, and the business.

Now, I'm worrying about whether or not Information Governance should be upper case.

<<Maurice Rivero: I think another fundamental area in Data Governance addresses the roles that stakeholders play around data: trusteeship, stewardship, custodianship, (and even guardianship, according to the NHS) which provide sounder and richer descriptions of the segregation of responsibilities in data management than the sterile concept of ownership ever did.>>

2017, June 7: If they're GLAM-orous, are they still records?

GLAM = galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. This posting is prompted by the newly opened [heritage display](#) of foundation documents (He Toho) in the National Library building in Molesworth St, Wellington. Two of these documents, the 1840 Treaty and the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition, used to be on display in the "Treaty Room" at Archives NZ in Mulgrave St. I'm not sure about where the Declaration of Independence was on show at that time (if at all). When I was at ArNZ, and had stewardship of the Treaty Room, I always wanted to revitalise it with an eye to better contextualisation and better story-telling (all good exhibitions are basically about telling a good story) – but I never had the money. I wanted to raise the profile of ArNZ and to "use" the documents to tell a recordkeeping story. I have long ago abandoned the fiction that documents speak for themselves.



Molesworth Street



Mulgrave Street

The display page sits on the National Library web site, clearly badged as "National Library", and the only reference to ArNZ is at the bottom of the page alongside the NLNZ logo. No explanation is given for the two logos being there or what involvement ArNZ has (e.g. "kindly on permanent loan from Archives NZ"). If you drill down, ArNZ has more prominence given



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to it on subordinate pages describing each of the documents – again for no apparent reason. In custodial terms, it is not clear, so far as I could see, which of the two institutions (if they can still be described as two institutions – I haven’t kept pace with legislative and administrative arrangements) is responsible for the documents or whether they are jointly deemed to have custody. The Library clearly has possession. He Toho is currently featured on the [Library’s top page](#). Any connection between the display and ArNZ is here beyond obscure, it is invisible. Not unnaturally, the NLNZ top page promotes NLNZ only. Inviting messages are extended to researchers, schools, librarians, publishers, and business to visit Molesworth St – not a word to suggest that it might be worth a visit to ArNZ at Mulgrave St across the road. Curiously, the [ArNZ site](#) still promotes the [Treaty](#) and the [Petition](#) on its own exhibitions page as if nothing has changed. I found nothing on the ArNZ site about He Toho. Perhaps they just haven’t caught up. The important issue to my mind is what role (if any) does ArNZ now have in how these documents are portrayed – especially if (heaven forefend) ArNZ has a different narrative to NLNZ – a recordkeeping narrative instead of (or as well as) a heritage narrative? Who has the last word?

In a post-custodial world, does any of this matter? NAA thought it did when it accepted deposit of records that are actually estrays filched from the archives of the Imperial Government in the UK and set them in a constitutional display in Canberra – “repatriation” it’s called. Huh! I suppose it could be viewed as a creative use of top-numbering. The Canadians tried (and maybe accomplished) the same thing. The New Zealanders, who actually have significant constitutional documents of their own, haven’t – so far as I know – tried it. Perhaps, in light of shenanigans in Canberra and Ottawa, we shouldn’t be too critical of the de-contextualisation going on in Wellington. Such displays are partly intended to magnify the importance of the custodial institution (and, incidentally, to make it immune from more deadly shenanigans by politicians). But shouldn’t archivists be purer than that and say that we don’t care about asset stripping and it is the r/keeping programme, not the bureaucratic entity that supervises it, that is important? Shouldn’t we view GLAM-orous activities as confusing and detrimental to our core mission? Got your attention now, haven’t I?

My view is that we can (and should) use GLAM to promote r/keeping but not the other way round and that we should be very careful not to give comfort to those who would portray us as just another GLAM-orous heritage “collection” – a word that should be banned from the archivist’s vocabulary. In other (more provocative) words, I think GLAM should be a subsidiary message, not a co-equal one. Claims that archives, despite being repositories of significant heritage materials, are part of a GLAM industry are not (in my view) helpful. Any marketing expert will tell you that having mixed messages defeats the purpose (though people in advertising and into self-promotion don’t always get this). I cannot claim the documents in question were displayed in Mulgrave St any more effectively than they are now (on line) in Molesworth St. There was a lot of blather about the “constitutional” role of ArNZ around the time their supporters took the parent department to court (a gutsy move). But the message always seemed to me confused and possession of the documents was never well employed (in my view) to advance the idea that archivists support the constitution (and many other things besides) through recordkeeping in ways that librarians and curators cannot. Instead of promoting objects/resources as glamorous, we should be actively preaching a different lesson – viz. that such a reading is in error if it obscures the r/keeping importance of the assets we manage. By all means support and facilitate other readings, but don’t let anyone be mistaken about why WE think they’re important.

That message is now so under-developed and its articulation so obscured by GLAM-orous enthusiasms that it is, perhaps, a lost cause. Terry Cook, who was not exactly on my side of the issue, tried to develop the debate many years ago but I don’t feel it was resolved (unless being overwhelmed can be regarded as a resolution). Many archivists still want to have their



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cake and eat it – so that may be the resolution, a weak-minded duality instead of a single focus. What would the r/keeping message be in relation to these particular documents? Frankly, I don't know any more. You cannot craft a r/keeping narrative about the Treaty and the Petition absent a conceptual and cultural framework that links heritage to r/keeping and that we do not have. Archivists have allowed themselves to be so overwhelmed by GLAM that there is no over-arching message into which it could fit. I think the r/keeping message alone is still more-or-less strong but the link between r/keeping and heritage (which archivists are uniquely well placed to articulate) is weak.

PS My friend, John Cross, tells of vol.1 of the Convict Indents (I think). Debate over their destruction was referred to London. Nothing was done and eventually the series was deposited in NSW State Archives. Vol.1 languished in London and eventually found its way into the UK PRO. More than 50 years later, it was removed and sent back to Sydney to rejoin the rest of the series. Proper repatriation. Apparently, the London/Sydney correspondence petered out and was resumed when a letter was sent from Sydney beginning w/o further explanation "With reference to your letter of ... [date from many decades past]...". A true r/keeping story.

<<**Peter J Crush**: RE: "Archivists have allowed themselves to be so over-whelmed by GLAM that there is no over-arching message into which it could fit." Thank you Chris for this food for thought and action.>>

2017, July 3:

<<**Gionni Di Gravio**:

... To answer your question, yes they are still records, even if they are GLAM-orous. Problem is that the other sectors of our GLAM family aren't always aware of what archivists are or do. At our last GLAM Peak meeting in Melbourne one of the presenters incorrectly stated that GLAM stood for "Galleries, Libraries, And Museums! ... we, as a profession, have largely kept to ourselves over the past 40 years trying to understand what it is to be an archivist, and how we differentiate ourselves from librarians.

You are right to say that archivists have allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by GLAM, but please be aware that there are some of us working actively to put our views on the world back into the GLAM mix. I'm not sure if you've seen the minutes and personal summaries of the GLAM Peak meetings that have been held, they are available here: <https://www.archivists.org.au/community/glamr-sector> ... I wrote this as part of my summary to our Australian Society of Archivists brethren (apologies if you've already read it) (Ref: <https://uoncc.wordpress.com/2016/03/04/glam-02-16/>) :

FINAL TAKE HOME MESSAGE TO ALL ARCHIVISTS

After this meeting, I went home a little overwhelmed and dejected. Overnight, clarity ensued, and I woke up to the very sharp focus of why it is important for archivists to "come out of the tent" and get involved across the GLAM sector organisations. The one fundamental reason for forming the Australian Society of Archivists (according to the [interviews with the original ASA pioneers](#)), was in order to differentiate the 'work' of archivists from that of librarians ... We now should well and truly know who we are, what we do, and how to do it. Now is it is time to rejoin our colleagues across the GLAM sector and help them out, get into the thick of it, and share our light, as many are struggling with understanding the context of their collections and how to portray them digitally ...

I return to the pie-chart in Chris McDermott's MCM Final Report. The biggest chunk representing over 200 million items lies within the public records. Arguably everything pretty much. Yet "the stuff" is scattered across a myriad of institutions and individuals grappling at how best to deal with them. Archives, the documentary records, are products of creative life on Earth, and are raining like confetti across all of Australia ... How people make sense of this, is where archivists can really help. We



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can help them identify where it came from, how best to describe it, conserve, give it its intellectual shape. But we have to be there, in the thick of it to help. Once that archival process stage has been completed, it can then be beautifully digitised into whatever format human communications can take into the future.>>

There are two possibilities raised by your argument:

- **Archivist/recordkeepers should go deeper into the world of GLAM** and make THEM “understand” and try to “differentiate ourselves”, conceding that we are GLAM-orous but a different sub-species, accepting terms of art like “collection”, “heritage”, and “significance”;
- **Archivist/recordkeepers could withdraw from GLAM** and tell THEM to buzz off because they are not US, that we are a different species altogether, that we don’t collect, display, rejoice, or delight, and deploying terms of art like “evidence”, “discrimination”, and “context”.

We had debates like this back in the 1990s. Not saying what the correct position is, not saying that the choice has to be binary, and not denying that most practitioners are trapped inside a paradigm that compels them to be both. Not even denying that a nuanced approach could profitably recognise the GLAM-orous side of our work, provided we get the balance right, but if I were trying to do that it would not be by speaking up within the GLAM community and trying to convince THEM of this right now – if we were as robust as you say we are and had something worthwhile to offer, maybe, but I don’t accept that (see below). We don’t need their understanding at the moment, we need the understanding of our stakeholders, those we serve (our employers and users) and integrating within GLAM may baffle and confuse our stakeholders rather than assist. If the misconceptions of curators and librarians are hostile to differentiated integration maybe we should rejoice and let them shrivel into mere GLaM. In other words, so far as the cultural side of our work is concerned, we should be differentiating ourselves to users of GLaM-orous resources and trying to get them to understand that WE are not the same as THEM. Insofar as the politics and the funding are concerned, it has always been my view that allowing confusion on this point when dealing with our masters (whatever the short term gains) is bad policy in the long run.



BUT even if we are compelled to operate as an adjunct to GLAM and cannot differentiate ourselves to stakeholders

- This is also about our frame of mind, how we think, what we value, how we behave, in short who we are – and that space cannot be invaded by the GLAM-orous if we don’t let them.
- If the decision (insofar as it was ever ours to make) had been to turn our backs on GLAM thirty years ago and to pursue different values and different goals, the captured institutions of today might look very different and might not be trapped inside the GLAM paradigm at all.



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The fact is that the real-world situation now of many of the institutions is schizophrenic – portraying themselves as GLAM-orous to one audience and as archivist/recordkeepers to another. Some might see this as an appropriate posture for a profession that adopts the Janus as its emblem. But how do we justify it to our stakeholders? How do we meet questions about whether these institutions should go on exercising dual roles? What support and nourishment does the cultural role afford the r/keeping role and vice versa? What, in short, is the value add in keeping them together?

I think there may be a subtle argument as you suggest for maintaining the connection, involving (in part) the differences in the ways archivists manage and display heritage materials but I don't see us delivering on that and I for one am more than a little overwhelmed by enthusiasms tending towards the deployment of heritage assets we manage in exactly the same way as all of the rest. In fact, some people seem hell bent on eliminating the differences in the way archival resources are deployed, without perhaps realising that this might establish the case for separating the two roles altogether. We aren't teaching them, they are submerging us. We are told that users of archival resources for cultural purposes don't care about evidence, discrimination, and context and at one level this is undoubtedly true of most (but not all) of them in the first instance. Most of them want to get at the stuff and they want to do so quickly using the google-model or various stylish heritage variations of it. So, that is what we have to provide. But I have never heard anything so dumb as the extrapolation that our users therefore don't care about the meaning of the information we provide, that they are too stupid and uncaring to understand and discriminate between a record and other sources of information, and that all we need to do is to keep piling our stuff into the general mix. You seem to agree with my distain.

I think I am the last person who needs persuading that global access to archival resources is needed (in conjunction with GLAM or not) founded on context and structure and deployed on the Internet. I cannot share your optimism that archivists have succeeded in identifying the requirements let alone in establishing robust solutions. My [Modest Proposal](#) sought to start a conversation as to what those requirements might be and a parallel conversation on [digitisation mania](#) is also needed. But I think we are in retreat before universal indiscriminating access solutions and clinging to paper methodologies in a digital age. Integrating an archival solution with access to resources outside the grip of archival institutions (what I call the "ungathered" resources) is one of the requirements I have suggested we need to look at. But we can't offer solutions to the GLAM-orous or invite them to learn from us because we don't yet have the solutions to offer. It is pointless aspiring to give GLAM contextualised solutions that work in the digital space if all we have is on-line versions of tools we developed in the paper age, if we are arrested in that stage of our development, and if we are (rightly) in danger of being submerged ourselves by global access tools developed to meet different aspirations.

2017, July 4:

<<Gionni Di Gravio: Apologies if I gave the impression that I was too optimistic that we had all the answers, I'm not saying that by any means. But that's not to say we won't come up with some great solutions in cooperation with others from outside our profession. So, I do advocate us being in the thick of it ... We do provenance, context, untangling what an 'archive' is as opposed to a 'collection' very well. We're good at understanding evidence, how to test it, how to trust it, how to know the human failings behind it. I think the GLAM organisations need our knowledge and expertise in what we *know* and *do* well, just like we need their help in what they *know*, and *do* well. There is quite a lot of stuff being digitised and entering the digital virtual world. Yes, it is a mess. Some of it is done well, some not. I know for a fact that our local communities are loving having access to original historical materials for the first time, ever ... My view is that we let them enjoy the experience of interrogating high



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resolution imagery about their local landscape. Allow the connections to be made, and let the original documents work their magic. With time, they will want to understand where these things come from, and that's where we need to be ready for them. Much of what we do is in the background, and maybe that's a good thing. I'm very happy to be the support guy to the 'theatrical production' that our users are experiencing. If the show is good enough, some will seek out what's behind it. The rampant digitisation, which is a mess, can be disconcerting, but what is truly exciting is how we are going to make sense of it all. What will be the overarching canvass that will convey context, provenance, depth of understanding to people accessing the digital object ... it is a conversation we need to be present at, and be there to influence ... >>



2017, July 5:

<<Adrian Cunningham: This is a very important discussion ... It cuts to the heart of the archival mission - are we primarily about preserving and enabling the use of documentary (cultural) heritage or are we primarily about enabling integrity, justice and good governance? Personally, I have never had a problem with these two roles co-existing and complementing each other ... How many occupations can claim to make two distinct, though interrelated and very important contributions to society? Reconciling, acknowledging and explaining these two roles underpinned the development by the ASA in the 1990s of "The Archivist's Mission" statement - which was formally endorsed by ASA Council and which appeared for many years in all ASA publications. Sadly, in recent years this seems to have disappeared from view ... The fact that these two roles should not be in competition or conflict with each other, but should support each other, was the key message in Terry Cook's landmark keynote address to the 2000 ASA Conference in Melbourne. It also was the subject of Verne Harris's attack on the records continuum at the ICA Congress in Seville in 2000 when he accused Australian continuum thinkers of abandoning the archival heartland (i.e. documentary heritage) ...

Chris argues that cleaving to these two roles risks confusing people with mixed messages and a 'weak minded duality'. Sure, that is a risk, but I would like to think that intelligent people would be capable of understanding how one profession can make two different but interrelated contributions to the greater good ... I would assert that we can be part of the 'GLAM industry' without losing our separate identity - just as we can part of the open government industry or the integrity in public administration industry without losing our separate identity ... Our relatively small numbers means that we may not always get properly heard - from time to time we may get overwhelmed and our institutions may get swallowed back into libraries, as Chris says. But that risk does not mean that we should deny the common interests we have with our GLAM partners ... Denying our heritage role seems like cutting off our nose to spite our face - but we should make it very clear that we are not limited to or exclusively defined by our heritage role.

None of which is to gainsay the very important point Chris makes about the dangers associated with putting all our eggs into the basket of indiscriminating



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universal online access. Yes, enabling access to records is vital - but it is only a means to an end and that end is use, understanding and informing our users about the evidence of their past. There is a real danger in archives just being treated like clickbait and measuring our value-add by the very blunt instrument of counting online hits ...

Before I end, I cannot help but comment on Chris's call to banish the word 'collection' from our vocabulary ... I have some attachment to the word and have never felt the need to apologise for it. Yes, technically government and in-house archives have 'holdings', not collections - but I have never been too precious about that. And in any case, there are many archival programs that do actively collect - and that is an entirely valid pursuit as Chris himself said back in 1996 in his memorable A&M article 'Beating the French'.>>

<<**Julia Mant:** Following with interest, but must protest about The Archivist's Mission: it is on the [ASA website](#) twice: and [again](#) >>

Let us not confuse "collection" as a term of art with the role and purpose of collecting archives. Collecting Archives (e.g. ANU, Melbourne U, the State manuscript libraries, etc.) hold many archival deposits from diverse corporations as well as personal archives. They may be a collection of archives, but they don't have to treat the records they curate as collectables. Some Government archives also hold archival deposits of personal archives which they may or may not justify on the grounds that such personal papers are organically part of the archives of the government they serve. The Government Archives seldom hold the entirety of the government's archival residue. The Commonwealth has always had joint archival authorities (NAA and AWM) and various arrangements exist in most governments for the dispersal of portion of the archives to specialist repositories (sometimes called places of deposit). Such arrangements can operate while recognizing the organic whole of the materials thus dispersed instead of treating the matter as a distribution of collectables.



Collecting Stamps



Processing Archives

That is quite different from objecting to "collection" and "collecting" as a way of describing how archivists (including right-thinking manuscript librarians) approach their role and go about their work - what Adrian and others call the archival mission. The archival mission has nothing to do with the mission statement of an organisation. It's the mix of GLAM and r/keeping within the archival mission that has to be considered, not whether the two roles can be conjoined organisationally. If they are two parts of a single mission, what needs to be demonstrated is not that they can be brought together under the umbrella of some convoluted mission statement but how they reinforce and nourish each other - and preferably how they are inextricably linked and cannot, without damage, be separated. Assumptions are being made about what I think. Let me be clear. I believe (I think I may say passionately) that a recordkeeping approach to the management of archival heritage materials is essential and the conjunction should be stoutly defended. It pains me to have to say this because I thought it ran clearly through nearly everything I have said and written over 30 years.

An archivist respects and preserves materials on the basis of structural connections conferred on the materials by the process of formation and use. A collector gathers and



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deploys material thematically. These approaches may or may not rest on physical co-location or inter-sorting of the materials and need not be mutually exclusive. An archivist may augment archival description by developing or facilitating thematic approaches and we are now discussing (or should be discussing) how far alternative archivally legitimate views of records may, in fact, occupy the space we once thought of as thematic (cf. parallel provenance). The difference is easily demonstrated:

- **DEAKIN ARCHIVES A:** documents brought together because they relate to Alfred Deakin regardless of origin and use; letters from Alfred are joined to letters by him.
- **DEAKIN ARCHIVES B:** documents gathered by Alfred Deakin, including letters to him, are treated as a discrete entity and letters from him (unless contained in a letter book) are treated as parts of other archives maintained by their recipients.

The distinction between the state of mind of custodians, their behaviour, their approach, has nothing to do with their assigned role. A doctor in charge of an immigrant detention centre is, first and foremost, a doctor, not a warden. A manuscript librarian is perfectly capable of being a cracking good archivist and there is nothing to prevent a government archivist from falling out of grace and becoming a mere collector (except perhaps a certain preciousness about eschewing the word “collection” from their vocabulary as a reminder of who they are and what they ought to be about). The archival state of mind can operate (or be lost sight of) in the high falutin' realms of government archiving or in the more modest arena of local history.

Adrian celebrates the conjunction of GLAM with recordkeeping. Such a conjunction requires, however, some kind of balancing act which is why I agree with him that this topic should never be regarded as closed. The point of my original posting was not to open a debate on the history and semantics of a word but to ask whether the balance as we have it now, in 2017, is the right one. Gionni takes one view and I take another but we seem to agree, he and I, that there is a problem even if we don't agree on what to do about it. What to do about it involves more than deciding how we relate to GLaM, it is also about theory and method in our own back yard. These are serious issues, difficult to analyse and resolve, but worth the effort I think.

2017, July 7:

<<[Lise Summers: ... I'm taken back to debates I've had about convergence - a hot topic at Curtin when looking at the ways in which libraries, archives and museums \(including galleries\) can be co-located, co-operate or be conjoined. Ultimately, it comes back to the mission and focus of the institutions, and the way in which they make their content available. For better or for worse, we are lumped with libraries and museums, and sporting bodies by the ABS, who look at the recreation side of the coin. Our materials are used for research, another GLAM focused purpose. In other jurisdictions, archivists are themselves researchers, both in terms of practice but also in understanding the materials they hold. And the Archives and recordkeeping group in the Research Data Alliance argue that the skills of archivists and records managers are critical to managing and making research data available. All these things are true, but they are not wholly true. We are more than this. It is important to engage with these groups and make archival material and archival knowledge more broadly known and understood. It is also important to understand and make known how our foci, missions and values diverge. I've recently found a very nice book on the topic of \[how and why libraries and archives differ\]\(#\) by Thomas Lidman, and reviewed by Maureen Sullivan in A&M in 2014](#)>>



2017, July 12:

<<Gianni Di Gravio: Chris, you are not alone, your concerns are echoed in the other professions, there are those who are worried about their professions being diluted, losing their "patch", being swamped by know-it-alls from other areas. It gets down to protecting one's back yard, and its understandable that GLAM is one of those areas that will be scary. The bright side to our interactions in the GLAM space is that there might be scope for greater awareness of what an 'archivist' actually does ...

And this is where the parallel discussion about the distinction between a "Collection" and an "Archive" is so important. This is where we need to develop a GLAM thesaurus, to ensure we are speaking the same language, so we can understand one another ... The way I approach it with my GLAM colleagues is that an "archive" is distinguished by a chain of provenance related to original work and their creators, as distinct from "Collections" which have been accumulated from a variety of sources by individuals and organisations. A Collection ... may possess papers, diaries kept by the individual collector; if they created it, then that is the 'archive' as opposed to their wider "collection". An Archive should reflect direct provenance, and denote the work of a creator(s), be it an individual, organisation, government agency etc. So many refer to photographic archives taken by a single photographer as a "Collection", when they should call it a photographic archive. It gets entangled, when you have original archives mixed within collections, and vice versa. This is a discussion, and a sorting out, that has to take place across the GLAM sector. And archivists are sorely needed to help.>>

<<Peter J Crush: For me the legitimacy of 'GLAM' representing a viable aggregation of related professions and institutions is tested by considering the materials for which each participating profession and institution is responsible and why and how they manage them.

- Galleries are generally responsible for selected works of visual and decorative art. They are kept and selectively displayed for the enjoyment and education of the general public and as a resource for researchers.
- Libraries are primarily responsible for selected published works in all forms. They are kept and made freely accessible for the enjoyment and education of the general public and as a resource for researchers.
- Archives are responsible for the preservation and use of records appraised as being worthy of on-going retention. They are kept and made accessible under controlled conditions for the enjoyment and education of the general public and as a reliable, authentic, unique resource for researchers.
- Museums are responsible for the collection, curation, and exhibition of representative objects from the natural and manufactured world. They are kept and selectively displayed for the enjoyment and education of the general public and as a resource for researchers.

The reason 'why' these various materials are kept - *for the enjoyment and education of the general public and as a resource for researchers* - is the common element shared by all professions and institutions ... It is when we consider the 'how' and its relationship to each category of material that the distinctions between the professions and institutions become obvious and necessary. My conclusion is that if you are responsible for all or some of the different categories that make up GLAM you are required to learn and apply the theory and practice of each of the professions related to the materials in your custody, preserving the essential differences of each in your daily practice.>>

2017, July 13:

Gionni says <<... there might be scope for greater awareness of what an 'archivist' actually does. I think this is important, as I'm not convinced that the GLAM sector really understands it ... My approach to them is that ... We can help sort out your 'collections'>>



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Extending an understanding of the archival mission into the realms of GLaM is a worthy goal. I would like to extend an understanding of the archival mission even more broadly than that. But that is not the larger question here, which is – do we ourselves still have a coherent understanding of the archival mission to extend to GLaM or to anyone else?

Is that mission to be found only in the fissure between the realm of the archive and the collection? I have few quibbles with Gionni's formulation of his message for GLaM as stated though I think the archival mission goes (or ought to go) further than that. But my questions remain as before: does there still exist a focused professional grouping subscribing both to Gionni's formulation of the archival message to GLaM combined with a larger understanding of what is fundamental to the archival mission? Or is our understanding of the archival mission disintegrating into a "collections" focus before the GLaM onslaught? And, by "collections" focus I don't just mean the lack of a proper understanding of structure and context, I also mean an end-of-life preoccupation.

If others are worried about the dilution of their professions, that can't be my concern. It's the possible dilution of mine that I worry about. The potential forces of dissolution go way, way beyond GLaM and we have known about them and debated them for many years – notably in relation to the transition we must make into a digital world.



The framework for this debate has been understood for most of that time. It was articulated for us by David Bearman who taught us to distinguish between goals and means – to understand the abiding functional requirements as distinct from the malleable methods needed to achieve them. It's a message that echoes the creed of Lampedusa's Prince in *The Leopard*:

“things must change if they are to stay the same”.

The question is: do we still fully understand what must change and what must stay the same? I think we've done OK so far as figuring out the implications of digital records-making, but I'm not so sure about GLaM and I'm not so sure about how successful we have been in communicating the archival mission (including both records-making and the records-keeping components) either to GLaM or to the wider world. We have developed original, coherent, and orthodox answers to many of the problems of digital r/making but our approaches to the digitised management of archival heritage resources seems to me to be derivative, pedestrian, and heterodox.

Many years ago, collecting archivists were nervous about their place in a r/keeping world - assuming they were condemned to be merely GLaM-orous and this meant they couldn't be r/keepers. As Adrian has reminded us, there was even a session about it at an ASA Conference. My answer to the collecting archivists then hasn't changed: you must find your place within an abiding r/keeping mission.



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2017, July 14:

<<Gionni Di Gravio: Chris asks: "- do we ourselves still have a coherent understanding of the archival mission to extend to GLAM or to anyone else?" Archivist's Mission: Some will, some won't, and some (like myself) will need to trust ourselves to be able to work it out.

... to build a house, a builder needs an electrician, bricklayers, plumbers etc, a whole assemblage of professions and skill sets to build it ... GLAM certainly will need a whole raft of professions and skill sets to build its house, including archivists ... We have recently acquired our first 3D scanning equipment for our GLAMx Digitisation Lab, and we have undergone a day's training in using a 3D scanner and software in digitising objects, in our case Aboriginal artefacts, dating back 6,500 years, and representing three waves of human habitation across the layers of a dune system at a site in Newcastle West.

There I was, with the innovation software developers, a conservator, historian, and an Aboriginal scholar (on the phone), having discussions over the naming of objects to reflect their "original order" in the dig, where to input the metadata? (*blank stares from software guys), us grappling with the 3D software skills, but ultimate satisfaction, when, after a tortuous sets of steps, a 3D virtual artefact emerged before our eyes ... We will need the help of librarians, archaeologists, [insert x], more software tweaking, etc as we progress. We will also be working with various local Aboriginal scholars, communities, as well as our work integrated learning students to experiment and use the technology, so each play a part in making this connection between the 'object' and themselves.

As an archivist, I'm adding my two bobs worth into the mix, making sure that this GLAM project reaches its destination, using the knowledge and expertise that we, as archivists understand, and others may not. It's a mutual learning curve, and we are building this house together. What we don't know we will certainly learn in the 'doing'.>>

2017, June 8: ... are they still records?

RE: [archives-and-records-australia:2037] Digest for archives-and-records-australia@googlegroups.com - 3 updates in 2 topics

<<Anna Blackman:... The documents, while they are on exhibition within the National Library building are in the custody of the Chief Archivist under the provisions of the Public Records Act 2005. Nothing happens to those documents without her say so. Archives NZ has been intimately involved with the project from the start...I agree that the He Tohu promotional material on the website does not make much of the connection with Archives NZ or the context of the documents, and it is a pity that Archives NZ has not yet updated their own website. The audience that the exhibition was designed for is secondary school pupils ... When you actually visit the exhibition there is more obvious archival contextualisation of the documents...>>

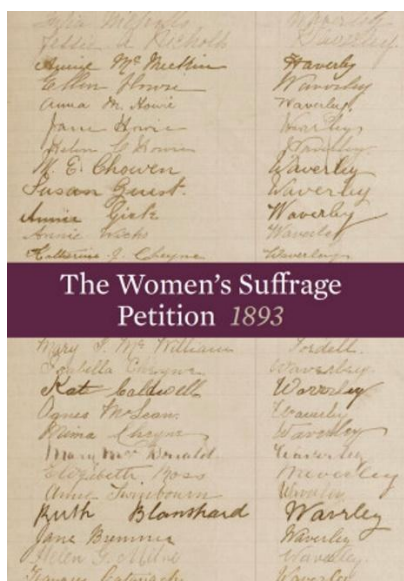
2017, June 9:

Thank you, Anna, for that clarification. To be clear, I was not going on about the relocation as such but about different ways in which these documents (wherever they are) can be contextualized - competing narratives if you prefer - and the question of who is responsible for crafting that. Such contextualization includes, of course, the documents' after-life: race relations, the treaty process, women in society not just as a backdrop but as relationships between the documents and their parallel provenance. It is an ultimate answer to the question: what do these documents mean? Parallel provenance is not just about indiscriminately displaying all aspects of cultural and social significance (however judged) but about choosing and highlighting some things that curators might deem unimportant and discarding others that are culturally more significant. The argument for it is that this is a different truth but an equally valuable one.



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I don't want to put words in your mouth, but you seem to be arguing that it is more important that the ultimate responsibility of the Chief Archivist for the documents is preserved than it is for that responsibility to be exercised to change the way the documents are displayed at the National Library. It is good to learn that the documents in question are still the responsibility of ArNZ though, as we both agree, there is precious little evidence of this in the online display. If any group in our two communities has a need to hear the r/keeping message I would say it is secondary school pupils, bombarded with factoids, disconnected twitter rants, unreliable and unverified opinions masked as news and encouraged (by some) to express their thoughts w/o fact checking. Learning how to think (not just what to think) and how to evaluate and verify opinions should lie at the heart of the educative process. Recordkeeping plays an important part in that.



Te Tiriti o Waitangi



There is no reason why librarians and curators cannot understand this (the importance of r/keeping) and act upon it. In my experience many do but many more don't and it is something the GLAM-orous amongst us don't seem to care much about. If there is an argument for not moving the documents across the road it is that the likelihood of going off message is greater - but I do not make that case. I am not saying that the glamorous message should be eschewed, simply that a nuanced message weaving together the many strands would look different to what is now online. The real difficulty is how to balance and weave together the different strands into a single coherent theme and that is impossible if the message is unbalanced to begin with. You say the physical display is more satisfactory. I hope it may be so.

As I tried to indicate in my posting, I'm not saying this was done well in the Treaty Room - at least not in my time with ArNZ.

2018, May 4: What's in a name?

Remember when arguments bubbled along about whether to separate "record" and "keeping" – viz record keeping vs recordkeeping? Browsing google for something else I stumbled on a page that suggests honours are almost evenly drawn. Page 1 results shown below for search on "recordkeeping"

U. of Tasmania Records Management Unit FAQs : [What is a recordkeeping system?](#)

Dictionary.com : [definition of recordkeeping](#) (claims the term originated in 1960-1965)

ATO : [Record keeping for small business](#)

English Language & Usage (StackExchange) : [Recordkeeping, record keeping, or record-keeping?](#)

goes on to discuss *E-mail* vs *Email* vs *e-mail* vs *email* vs *E mail* vs *e mail*?



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Business Queensland : [Record keeping for business](#)

Business Queensland : [Electronic and manual record keeping](#)

Recordkeeping Innovation : [Recordkeeping by design](#)

Business.gov.au : [Record keeping for small business owners](#)

Business.gov.au : [Record keeping systems: digital or manual?](#)

Queensland Government : [Recordkeeping](#)

Still, I suppose you could argue that if a search for “recordkeeping” turns up a page 1 result that is 50/50 with “record keeping”, it’s not honours drawn after all. Interestingly, Gov.Qld is having a bob each way.

<<**Michael Piggott**: Chris has drawn attention to one of the more arcane and I think interesting sidelights of our little world. I’ve always thought – who cares?, but apparently people do, eg dear old Verne Harris, from memory, and definitely the editors of Archivaria. If, as a great linguistic philosopher said, the limits of our language are the limits of our world, what difference does the difference make. Perhaps we need new terms? Maybe record making v record keeping?>>

2018. August 6: Representing Multicultural Australia ... in Libraries

Call for proposals - Representing Multicultural Australia in National and State Libraries symposium, 20-22 Feb 2019

<<**Michael Piggott**: ... An ARC research project I'm involved with ... is organising a symposium in Melbourne in February 2019. Proposals for abstracts welcome ...>>

2019, January 22:

<<**Michael Piggott**: ... due to the limited take-up of the invitation to present papers, the organisers decided not to proceed with the symposium as planned ... However, they will be looking at the possibility of re-scheduling the event at a future time, in which case they will get back in touch to gauge interest in attending and participating.>>

Might there have been more take-up if the symposium had a broader theme – viz.

- Representing Multicultural Australia in Libraries , or
- Representing Multicultural Australia in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums?

I suppose the research project funding defines what the project is and therefore what the symposium had to be about but a broader theme might have been interesting because it could tell us more and because it would have offered opportunities to compare and contrast. Would it, I wonder, have dealt with representing

- multicultural Australia, or
- multiculturalism in Australia?

whatever “representing” might mean.

2018, September 12: Guardians for Truth?

When I recently posted from the SAA/ARA Conferences, I made the claim that objectivity, impartiality, and accuracy are in our DNA. I was, of course, aware that in the post-modernist age of relativism, this claim has been widely discredited amongst us – as have those values more generally. There is no truth, one claim is as good as another, everything is relative – as if a fair minded balance is incompatible with impartiality instead of being its most likely result. Respecting other views has become the rationale for shutting down debate (de-platforming); fairness has given birth to the monstrosity that is 18C. The Coalition wants to protect religious freedoms, which is a nonsense; we should be protecting all freedoms, not just religious ones. In a dark corner of my soul, there is rejoicing that many of those who have attacked those values in the service of devaluing or suppressing what they don’t like and exalting or enforcing what they support are now dismayed when their tools of



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destruction and oppression are adopted by others (as it was inevitable they would be) to attack what they themselves hold near and dear. A case of the biter bit, or be careful what you wish for. The whine of outrage runs through the latest [editorial](#) in *The Conversation*:

Over the past few years you will have heard a lot about fake news ... Trust in media is in decline globally, and every time we talk about fake news we hasten the trend by spreading a myth of false equivalence. With Donald Trump labelling everything short of sycophantic praise as “fake news”, too many people are falling into the trap of thinking “they’re all as bad as each other”. But they’re not, and the differences matter. The New York Times might make mistakes, but its editorial standards are qualitatively superior to those at Fox News or a conspiracy theorist’s blog. In Australia the ABC has recently been under attack for giving a platform to Steve Bannon, but its rare debatable judgement calls actually underline its overall commitment to quality. We should be willing to critique media outlets robustly, but if we forget how to give credit where it’s due we destroy the incentive for media outlets to hold themselves to a higher standard ... We don’t claim to be perfect, but we do claim to be different in ways that matter, and we think that’s something you ought to know about.

How interesting that in this apparent plea for liberal values the editorialist still snipes at the ABC for giving a voice to Bannon as a “rare debatable judgement call” – still wanting (seemingly) to shut down those he/she disagrees with. A true commitment to quality requires that you give the Bannons and the other ratbags an opportunity to speak.

On Wed, Sep 12, 2018 at 6:54 PM Chris Gousmett <Chris.G...@huttcity.govt.nz> wrote:

If the claim that there is no truth is true then it is false. It cannot be true that there is no truth since that claim is false if it is true, as it claims truth for the claim that there is no truth. So if this claim is true then it is false. Q.E.D.

The claim that objectivity etc. is discredited does not account for commonly perceived states of affairs, that is, the world exists and behaves in certain ways, not at random, and we can all experience the world and articulate that experience in ways which are comprehensible to others.

The strong claims of objectivity made by positivists have been refuted since we all perceive the world from specific situatedness within it and not as detached observers. But this does not prove there is no commonly accepted reality which we can all know and understand in ways which evidence its regularity and orderedness which is independent of our experience of it.

We should respect other persons who have views different from our own but that is not to claim that differing (and incompatible) views are equally true. That view which best explains the whole of our experience should be considered to convey more truth than one which cannot account for the whole of our experience. Encountering views unlike our own should make us reconsider our own views to see if they need revising or expanding to account for something that others have seen what we do not, but it does not mean we should assume that if someone has views unlike our own that either we or they are completely wrong.

To say that all views are equally true is to admit that all views are equally irrelevant or unimportant since all we do is remain stuck in our own views while dismissing the views of others. If we think that our own views are true for us while the views of others are true for them then none of these views can have any claim on us as truly telling us something meaningful about the world and our experience of it. To say that all views are equally true is to denigrate all views as equally irrelevant except our own.

Record keeping is about creation and preservation of evidence of activity. If those records cannot be understood to provide evidence (commonly accepted true expression of states of affairs) which is accepted as true (even if contested as partial or limited in some way) then all our work is pointless and there is no reason for anyone to create a record of anything.

Chris Gousmett



13 September, 2018:

The terms impartiality and objectivity refer to different things tho' they may be closely related (at least in the minds of some). Impartiality may refer to

- a quality of the archives themselves derived from the circumstances of their creation which we try to preserve,
- a value we aspire to cultivate in ourselves when handling archives (e.g. appraisals),,
- our approach to the interpretation and description of archives...

It is my understanding that some r/keepers question the possibility of the latter two (maybe all three).

Chris Gousmett says <<The strong claims of objectivity made by positivists have been refuted since we all perceive the world from specific situatedness within it and not as detached observers.>>

Quite so. If anyone should understand how context (situatedness) impacts on observation and understanding of the record surely it must be us. When we present or preserve a record within a stated context it is not our understanding that confers meaning but the context into which we have chosen to place it. Some argue that this decision-making on our part (which context to give it) precludes any claims by us to impartiality. But it is possible to contextualise more adroitly. Hence parallel provenance which, in a nutshell, provides a mechanism for archivists to hold and present two different and possibly contradictory views of the same record simultaneously.

2018, October 31: How archivists could stop deepfakes from rewriting history

<<LisaG: I posted [this article](#) to a discussion board for one of my preservation classes. A student responded saying that this article was a great summary of what we had been learning (as we progress into digital preservation). I have mixed feelings about that comment. I teach a lot of students in that class who have not done any records or archives classes. Lots of feelings. I see this comment in the article from an archivist who was interviewed, and I worry:

"She said that descriptions of information and its metadata are a major part of archival work: In other words, documenting the context of the content."

I worry for two reasons. Firstly, archival documentation is not *just* about documenting the context of the content. Although that is purpose is part of the work, of course. But mostly, I worry about the perception that it is the archivists role to 'solve' issues of authenticity by examining provenance.

It is the Internet Archive's director of the television archive that says:

"The more disturbing possibility with deepfakes is that historical records will include manipulated media presented as reality, whether that's because an archivist wasn't able to identify a video's origin correctly or because someone was able to infiltrate records and [manipulate them](#)."

Someone said that in [2017 there are over 7 billion videos on YouTube](#). I love this site called Every Second which tells you how much digital stuff is being created and viewed and money made online every second. This is [their page](#) for Facebook:

What role does the archivist and the archive have in these contexts? Thoughts?>>

For me the answer is fairly simple ('cos I'm a simple-minded person, I guess). Recordkeepers (including archivists) make and keep records – all records, not just “historical records”. That means, inter alia, preserving records that exist and need to go on existing (as well as some concern with important matters where reliable records are not being made/kept) and all that means (inter alia) preserving the meaning of records as well as their fabric. If you doubt that records have meaning that can be preserved, you should be in another line of work. Can meaning be ambiguous and contested? Of course it can. Does that mean that “meaning” is meaningless? Of course it does not. Explaining and documenting the meaning of records goes some way to “solving” authenticity issues but not the whole way. And we don't do that



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merely by “examining provenance”; we do it in various ways (including an examination of structure). We shouldn’t claim to be providing a complete authentication but we shouldn’t shrink from our time-honoured role in a postmodern funk either. We do the best we can, as transparently as we can, and as honestly as we can.

Just as users of records must make their own evaluation of the records, they must also make their own evaluations of our poor efforts to establish and preserve their meaning. Like everything else in this wicked world, what we do (if we do it with a good heart and honest intent) is better than nothing. Fake news didn’t come out of nowhere; it was born and bred in the swamp of relativism. How ironic it is that upholders of that flawed doctrine are now being bitten themselves by the uglies who have learned from them (all too well) how to throw doubt and confusion on honest endeavours at understanding. As I have argued elsewhere, we are not alone in this struggle. Librarians and curators have a similar mission – along with scientists, scholars, philosophers, fact-checkers, whistleblowers and many others who stand up for truth and accuracy. Their ways are not exactly the same as our ways but we share a common persona as truth-tellers. Or, at any rate, that is what we should aspire to. Relating to my earlier posting on “Documenting Australian Society” I would say that truth-telling (one of many methods we employ which has nothing to do with collecting per se) is an important support for that objective also.

Exposing deep-fakes is not, I believe, our primary role - but we can sometimes be helpful. Witness the role of the Bundesarchiv in exposing the fake Hitler Diaries. In the past, archives and archivists have been involved in faking the record(s) so establishing and maintaining our bona fides can be a struggle. From the [Donation of Constantine](#) to the [Protocols of the Elders of Zion](#), fake documents have been used to promote special interests. [James Addison Reavis](#) famously “forged ... documents in archives in Guadalajara, Mexico and Madrid ... to establish a line of inheritance for the Spanish Peralta Barons of Arizona ...” in order to uphold a fraudulent land grant claim. The move into digital space complicates the forensics but we know a lot more now about digital authenticity and that has much to do with provenance, structure, and the way assets are managed digitally and about how those things are documented.

2019, January 14: [How do you identify?](#)

What trade do you enter on official forms (census, tax returns, passenger cards)? Archivist, recordkeeper, record keeper, chronicler, annalist, recorder, collector, curator, pack rat, custodian, preserver, guardian, protector, steward, glam-a-phile, hunter/gatherer, magpie, squirrel, research-abettor, guidance counsellor, ubiquity-enabler, access facilitator, keeper-of-memory or destroyer-of-memory (depending on how involved you are in appraisal),? If we got our act together and all said the same thing we might qualify for the list of [weirdest jobs with the lowest pay](#). Sounds like we might belong with that crowd.

Sailmakers are among the nation's rarest workers. A total of 171 people listed the trade as their primary occupation when they filled out their tax return in 2015/16, Australian Taxation Office data shows. Other rare jobs include bungee jump masters (six, all of them male) along with white water rafting guides (24 people), mountain or glacier guides (31), gunsmiths (59), civil celebrants (63), traditional Chinese medicine practitioners (182), composers (251), and illustrators (257)... Gunsmiths and illustrators earn about \$53,000 on average annually, and composers make just under \$43,000, the remainder of these other professions earn below \$35,000. However, some of these jobs are primarily carried out part-time, which may reduce the median. Median annual taxable-income figures include not only the job’s salary, but any possible additional earnings from rent, bank interest, dividends and bonuses. They are based on the amounts people stated as their earnings before tax but after deductions on their 2015/16 tax returns. The median figure for each job includes everyone who listed it as their primary source of income, so it will include full-timers, part-timers and



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casuals. If your occupation has a lot of part-time staff it might have driven down the median income, making the amount listed as the full-time median a better guide to its expected earnings.

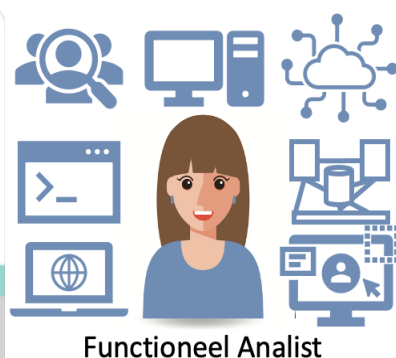
Last time I travelled o'seas I don't think I had to fill out a passenger card. Can't remember if I had to tell the airline my avocation, though.

PS. In case someone asks an "annalist" is a writer of annals Meriam-Webster.

Annals:

- 1) a record of events arranged in yearly sequence
- 2) historical records
- 3) records of the activities of an organization.

It's what I've been doing my whole professional life. I think I'll put it down on my next tax return and see what happens.



<<**Michael Piggott:** "Annalist" has a lot going it (as long as the outsourced data entry person keys it in correctly) and there's a nice allusion to the famous French school of history too. Perhaps for completeness the only role missing from the list that should be there is the professional denial role, i.e. employee of the organisation one happens to work for [incidentally as an archivist, etc], e.g. "New South Wales public servant", or "ASO 5, National Library". But it is almost not worth the effort repeating Chris' words "If we got our act together and all said the same thing ...". We? Is there a "we"?

When one plays these games, I always like to get in a mention of the "health information management" people. Started in the late 1940s calling themselves medical records librarians, then moved to medical records managers (tho made sure they were separate from the then RMAA/RIMPA) and for quite a while now HIM, with "i" sometimes also meaning "informatics". And why not, it still has currency, and sounds suitably arcane. Have a look at the HIMAA website <http://www.himaa2.org.au/> They seem to know who they are and have seriously got their act together. If there's a lesson here, perhaps it is always change, but stay narrow.

Back to our messy ever changing reality, hours before Chris' post the Vic Branch of the ASA advertised a Digital Preservation for Beginners workshop. It mentioned "heritage collection setting" and "digital materials", and three roles, "Archives and Records consultant", "Research Archivist" and "Data Stewardship Coordinator". >>

2019, January 16:

Wouldn't Data Annalist make a great job title? I may change my domain name from www.descriptionguy.com to www.dataannalist.com. And when I fully retire, I might set up shop as a Consulting Data Annalist (I bet I'd be the only one).

2019, January 22:

<<**Deborah Leigo:** Way back in 2004, LIS educators were touting Information Professional as the new, all encompassing, term to cover professionals in the Library, Records & Archives fields. Doesn't really seem to have caught on, conversely, the array

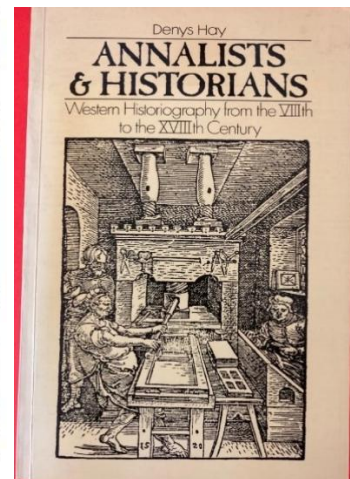


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of terms used has increased and seemingly become so individualised that they are almost meaningless. I have on occasion used Information Profession, then had to give a long-winded explanation as to what that entails. When I refer to myself as an Archivist, I usually have to explain what archives are. I very much like Chris's 'Data Annalist' and look forward to an opportunity to use it.>>

2019, January 23:

<<**Gene Melzack:** Enter a variety of these occupations into the interactive form in [this article](#), and they'll all get rolled up into the category of "Archivists, Curators, and Records Managers": This category is apparently five years older than the average for all workers, slightly less religious than average, slightly more likely to be born in Australia, and the suburb with the most workers in this professional category in 2016 was Coburg.>>



2019, January 24:

<<**John Machin:** The ANZSCO, which is the classification that underpins the form in the previous email, gets updated now and by experts at the ABS and SNZ. They haven't always been good at locating their own profession in the occupational categories - although they only have themselves to blame for this, I suppose.

The definition of the tasks and duties which define the class can be found in [the following link](#). They are quite sparse though might not reflect the state of the art in our self description. (Yes, that is Lotus as a CMS...)

I was wondering if the Skills Framework for an Information Age (SFIA) work had included archivists by that name or had broken us down to atoms of competence and re-performed them in new configurations or under new labels.>>

2022, November 4:

Reporting the results of the 2021 Census, the B. of Statistics still uses the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations](#) (ANZCO). For those of us who haven't kept up with the latest updates to this useful tool, here is an extract showing where we fit –

2. PROFESSIONALS

22 Business, Human Resource and Marketing Professionals

224 Information and Organisation Professionals

.....

2242 Archivists, Curators and Records Managers

224200 Archivists, Curators and Records Managers nfd

224211 Archivist

224212 Gallery or Museum Curator

224213 Health Information Manager

224214 Records Manager

.....



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2246 Librarians
 224611 Librarian
 2247 Management and Organisation Analysts
 224700 Management and Organisation Analysts nfd
 224711 Management Consultant
 224712 Organisation and Methods Analyst

2022, November 6:

Heard the term “[feminised workforce](#)” used (a lot) on *Insiders* this morning. Does this term accurately include us? Anecdotally, “women in cardigans” is how archivists, curators, and librarians (records managers even) are sometimes described. What are the metrics?

Does anyone know if the Census or any other source provides data on the gender breakdown within our occupation categories?

A breakdown by educational/training would also be interesting (if available).

2020, April 17: [An adumbration of archivists?](#)

James Lipton, sometime host of [Inside the Actors Studio](#) and author of [An Exaltation of Larks](#) (the indispensable guide to collective nouns) [died last month](#) (2 March). My edition (Penguin, 1991) contains no collective noun for archivist or recordkeeper. Obvious contenders such as “file” or “series” are overlooked. It offers “shush of librarians” and “trove of libraries” and they are welcome to them. A “march of museums” (it’s a long march from the Louvre, to the Prado, to the Hermitage, etc. or maybe because you need to walk a lot when you’re inside one) seems a trifle strained.

I have long held that philosophically archivists are [Aristotelians](#)

(... an inductive, [analytical empiricism](#), or stress on experience, in the study of nature ... leading from the perception of [contingent](#) individual occurrences to the discovery of permanent, universal patterns ...)

rather than [Platonists](#)

(... a belief in unchanging and eternal realities, which Plato called forms, independent of the changing things of the world perceived by the senses...)

and “category of Aristotelians” contrasted with “form of Platonists” makes the distinction rather well. Description for us, not classification.

PS One possibility (“coffle”) would be too politically incorrect. The book tells us that “coffle” is a term once in common use for a line of slaves, chained together, from the Arabic “qafila” (caravan).

2020, April 21:

<<[Michael Piggott](#): ... here's my nomination inspired by the whimsical 'coffle'. It's 'hamper', ie a hamper of archivists. Several relevant and layered meanings, mentioned in [Jenkinson](#), and interesting etymology. Perhaps the challenge would be simpler if the word archives wasn't used in so many different ways. A millionth example of appropriation, kindly drawn to my attention by Dr Andrew Wilson, is the very trendy and environmentally correct shirt label [Archivist Studio](#)! >>

2020, April 24:

I’ve waited four days, Michael, for someone else to ask this question but I can contain myself no longer. Which of the two possible meanings of “hamper” did you have in mind?

- [large, rectangular container with a lid](#) (bin, coffer, safety container, carton, type 1 box, USB, etc.) as in where we put the stuff for safekeeping, or



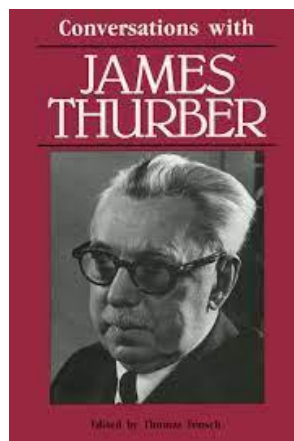
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- to prevent someone doing something easily (avoid, bar, block, derail, scuttle, create a bottleneck, smother, be a drag, hogtie, etc.) as in the obstacles we create for users by destroying more than we keep, writing arcane and unhelpful finding aids, redaction and access restrictions.

Can you expand on “... relevant and layered meanings mentioned in Jenkinson...”

2020, April 25:

<<Michael Piggott:...I had proposed 'hamper' - a hamper of archivists - only half frivolously in response to a thread which seemed both serious and frivolous. Partly because any term from Hilary Jenkinson has to have some additional cachet. Not sure if he ever used adumbration. In his 'Manual' he explains (1966 reissue of the revised 2nd ed., p 23-4) he uses the term file 'as a generic term for a sack or box or hamper or other receptacle' and in a footnote mentions that 'the "Hanaper" (hamper) gave its name to a whole Archive Department'. And 'hanaper' also conjures an historic English office, the Clerk of the Hanaper whose duties included the physical custody of records. (Thomas Cromwell of renewed fame thanks to Hilary Mantel was once such a Clerk). About its layered meanings, Chris pretty much read my mind: the various obstacles we deliberately and inadvertently create, though I'd add we hamper, or try to, the deterioration of records, ie their so called inherent vice, through preservation strategies, physical and digital.>>



James Thurber, in [Here Lies Miss Groby](#), recounts how he annoyed his school-teacher when she was trying to teach him about metonymy,

a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept.

A common example, the one Miss Groby was trying to teach to young James, is container for the thing contained (e.g. “*lend me your ears*”). The lad Thurber was very pleased with himself when he thought up an example of thing contained for the container (“*stand back or I’ll hit you with the milk*” – this from when milk still came in bottles). It occurs to me that hanaper is an example of metonymy in action: a shift in meaning where the word for the container came to mean the thing contained –

HANAPER, used particularly in the English Chancery of a wicker basket in which were kept writs and other documents, and hence it became the name of a department of the chancery, now abolished, under an officer known as the clerk of the hanaper, into which were paid fees for the sealing of charters, patents, &c., and from which issued certain writs under the Great Seal. From "hanaper" is derived the modern "hamper." [Encyclopedia Britannica](#), 1911,

Miss Groby would be pleased. This is not altogether removed from what I had in mind with adumbration (viz. description for the thing described)–

- “to produce a faint image or resemblance of; to outline or sketch ...”



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- “[to suggest, disclose, or outline partially ...](#)”
- “[the act of giving the main facts and not the details about something, or something that gives these main facts](#)”
- “[a sketchy or imperfect or faint representation](#)”
synonyms: “explanation”, “hint”, “manifestation”, “suggestion”, “trace”

Our descriptions are representations of the thing being described, not the thing itself. Like calendars and cartularies, a finding aid is no substitute for the record. We endeavour to represent reality faithfully and accurately but we are doomed to crafting a limited, faint, imperfect outline of what we see and understand. The underlying basis for parallel provenance is that alternative observations of the same object are always possible and, because they are observations, very likely to be partial (in the sense of incomplete rather than biased). *The vision ... that thou dost see is my vision's greatest enemy ... thou readst black where I read white.* It follows that every description, however worthy or valuable, will always have no more than an imperfect resemblance to what we see. Which does not, of course, mean that any description is as good as any other – imperfect but not untrue. Indeed, truth may be said to lie as much in the multiplicity as in the rejection of falsehoods.

2020, April 26:

<<**Deb Liego: could ‘hamper (container) of hanaper (contained) adumbrations (representations)’ work in place of ‘descriptions of boxed records’?**>>

2020, April 27:

Yes. But I fear that, once we're through teasing out the whimsy and the nuance, all we'll be left with is a collective noun. And possibly a new instance of C.F.T.T.C.

2020, May 13: Archiving the present

Memory institutions are [documenting](#) the pandemic:

The State Library of Victoria is working to enlist an army of citizen collectors who can help it gather Covid-19 related materials. This is the idea behind [Memory Bank: A Collective Isolation Project](#), the library's major pandemic archiving project.

“A citizen collector really needs to be an anthropologist for the future and to think about the kinds of things that we take for granted that someone in the future may find absolutely fascinating,” says a senior curator, Carolyn Fraser. She lists leaflets, pamphlets and temporary take-out menus as examples of items that the library might be interested in acquiring ... the library is also releasing a series of weekly prompts which will encourage people to share details about their pandemic lives ...

... The New South Wales State Library [is] asking people to share pictures from self-isolation on social media using the hashtag #NSWathome ... People are also being encouraged to keep a written record. [The Diary Files](#) is another of the Covid-19 projects launched by the SLNSW ...

We used to say that archives are formed un-selfconsciously and without intent as to third-party use but some of us would now say that r/keeping is usually purposeful (created for one intention or another) without necessarily being intended for random third-party use – e.g. the diary dilemma (what or who is the diarist writing for?). Indeed, understanding the intention of the records-maker is an important part of understanding its context. I have gone further and speculated that we need the concept of the accidental record/archive – viz. a documentary survival that was never intended to be kept (cf. the “NAP”) and might truly be said to be devoid of purpose.

What I find interesting here is the directed nature of what is going on, the primary purpose both of the creator and the collector being to form an historical record. The material is being



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gathered contemporaneously for no other purpose. Lots of juice there for an extended debate about the nature of r/keeping.

At a more mundane level, however, what interests me is the mechanics. Letters and diaries have given way to email and social media and efforts are in place to “archive” some of this. But broad-brush harvesting results in voluminous and incoherent accretions. Diaries and letters used to be the bread-and-butter of personal archiving. Perhaps themed citizen-collecting (in all sorts of post-pandemic areas) offers a new way. With the attendant dangers, of course, of evil intent (ideology, propaganda, etc.) and innocent frailty (bias, prejudice, etc.) about which Jenkinson would have something to say.

<<[Joanna Sassoon](#):...here in Western Australia the cultural institutions have also jumped on the contemporary collecting bandwagon, though with some confusion as to the collecting roles of a Museum, a State Library and a State Archive/Records office ... "The Museum will approach recording these times in two distinct ways which we have called 'Collecting the State' and 'Collecting the Community' ... Collecting the State will focus on the leading role that is the responsibility of our political leaders, state government agencies and other key sectors. Collecting the Community will take a people-first approach to exploring the experiences of individuals and communities across WA.">>

2020, May 16:

Very Model of a Mad Roman Emperor



According to that purveyor of Fake News, [Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus](#) (c.69-p.122 AD), the Emperor Caligula planned to appoint his favourite horse, [Incitatus](#), to the Senate – although he never actually did. This legend may simply be a “joke [that] has been interpreted as historical fact.” A second source, Cassius Dio (155-235 AD), tells us that Incitatus was, in fact, made a priest. In 2016, the Comet Restaurant in Washington D.C. was accused of child-sex-trafficking ([Pizzagate](#)). This latter falsehood (and its debunking) is documented by many more than two sources – for and against.

[After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News](#) is a chilling documentary that has just screened on pay TV. It was depressing for its content (the subversion of Truth) but also, I felt, for moral and intellectual confusion when it came to channelling a response and for the air-time it gave to those who argued that suppression was the answer - to say nothing of those promoting White Fake News as the antidote to Black Fake News. I am with those who argued instead that Truth is the only proper response to Lies. The programme was also weak in not identifying how post-Truth is a disease affecting the Left as well as the Right (cf. [Covington Kids](#)) and not looking beneath its manifestations into its underlying cause – viz. [Relativism](#). Indeed, I have suggested in an [earlier post](#) to this List that Trump is the child of post-modernism, noting the distinction between Relativism and [Pluralism](#).



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I follow certain litmus tests. If it sounds too outrageous to be true it probably is. Any whiff of ideology predisposes me against belief. Transparency and rigour of process combined with consistency are qualities I look for and value. So, what has all this got to do with us? It has to do with the role of citizen archivists. Does it not raise the question of how collectors deal with contributors having an agenda (as most of them will have, to a greater or lesser extent)?



Selective suppression of Facebook, Twitter, etc, is the answer of some to the problem of Fake News and the parallel for us would be a view that collectors have a similar duty to filter contributions from citizen archivists. On this argument, the content would be supplied but the context (its meaning and structure) would need to be imposed by the collector unless the collector takes the further step of actually rejecting (suppressing) some contributions. That simply shifts the spotlight from the bias of the contributor onto the bias of the collector. If the contributions are artefacts of some kind, gathered but not created by contributors and not involving the contributor's opinions beyond the process of selection, it may be a question of sourcing the artefact and questioning its origins (provenance). This new definition of citizen archivist (not just as volunteers in the work of the archives but as hunter-gatherers of archival source material however dubious, however genuine) needs reflection and debate and a revivification perhaps of the dispute over impartiality.

PS. How's this for irony: If you Google "Covington kids" you get – in my view - a reasonably reliable and nuanced analysis from Wikipedia coming out on top (outlining the initial left-wing misrepresentation of the affair and subsequent recantation by some, but not all, of those responsible) followed in second place by a *New York Post* opinion piece using the incident to lambast the Left media. A case of bias, instead of being understood as a warning against ideology of any kind, has become a weapon in furtherance of the culture wars. Immediately, without going beyond page one, we the users of the information supplied by Google are faced with the (unavoidable) task of discriminating between the sources.

2020, May 17:

<<**Chris Gousmett:...** if we are to be serious about context when accessioning records, then is not the whole "fake news" phenomenon part of that context of the events of our day? If we retain a selection of records from the present, will they be comprehensible in the future without the "fake news" they may be responding to, bouncing off, perpetuating, etc.? That is, is "fake news" itself worthy of retention as an archive of an important cultural phenomenon of our age? We may reject the suggestion of retaining erroneous opinion/propaganda as an archive but we need to ensure that archival collections reflect the whole of our age and not just a slice that we would prefer had happened in isolation. That is, are we showing bias in favour of one part of the cultural phenomenon and ignoring another equally prominent part, much as we might wish it did not exist?>>



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<<[Michael Piggott](#): This is one of the worries I have whenever an institution, an historian, a research project with an on trend topic attractive to resource allocators, whoever - builds a collection via public appeals to contribute your "stuff" (look at me, this is how I coped during the lock down, etc). Yet another library has now joined the bandwagon, the [SLV](#). "We're calling on all Victorians to join us as we inaugurate the Memory Bank to archive what everyday life in Victoria is *actually like now*, during this time of collective isolation". Putting aside the question why didn't you want to document everyday life twenty years ago, shouldn't we also want to document examples of people who wouldn't contribute in a fit to these appeals ... >>

One of those interviewed on *After Truth* ... conjured up a truly frightening vision. Suppose, she asked, that post-Truth narratives continue to proliferate? What will happen in twenty years when someone does an Internet search for "[Sandy Hook](#)" and the first three pages of results display claims that it was a hoax? If that doesn't terrify you, I can't imagine what will. So, as Michael's question reminds us. the collector may fail twice over -

- Collaborating in the construction of a false and misleading narrative based on the urgings of self-selecting contributors.
- Constructing an unbalanced narrative that omits those who do not contribute (Terry Cook's [hidden voices](#)).

What a dilemma! The only remedy seems to be for the archivist to intervene in the service of Truth – thereby violating Jenkinson's warning not "to import into the collection under his charge what we have been throughout most anxious to keep out of it, an element of his personal judgement". And if we do yield to temptation and import our personal judgement, how can anyone know that we are telling the Truth? They will only know if we can establish (or maintain) archives as trusted sources of Truth. Laugh at Jenkinson if you want, but can there be any doubt that his intention was just that - to keep the archives pure and unsullied. We screw around with that at our peril.



2020, May 18:

The only remedy seems to be for the archivist to intervene in the service of Truth.

But doesn't that commit the very mistake against which Jenkinson warns? The logic of his position is his famous denial that archivists have a role in appraisal. While we can admire the courage that led him to this conclusion, we cannot endorse it because we know that the archivist is a flawed defender of Truth as a result of our participation (conscious or unconscious) in the process. If we want archives to be trusted despite this flaw, it can only be on the basis of our values. There is a choice to be made between-

- We must try to be as impartial and objective as we possibly can, and
- Oh well, hey ho, it can't be helped, so let's not worry about it.

Do we trust the mainstream media and (if so) on what basis? It can only be on the basis of **their** values which were nowhere more debased than in their [failure](#) to properly report on Iraq War 2. The hindsight defence is now used that the Coalition of the Willing (US,



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Australia, Britain) got it wrong but it was a genuine mistake. But the lies were apparent at the time and most in the media failed to pursue them –

Most of the administration's case for that war made absolutely no sense, specifically the notion that Saddam Hussein was allied with Osama bin Laden. That one from the get-go rang all the bells — a secular Arab dictator allied with a radical Islamist whose goal was to overthrow secular dictators and reestablish his Caliphate? The more we examined it, the more it stank. The second thing was rather than relying entirely on people of high rank with household names as sources, we had sources who were not political appointees. One of the things that has gone very wrong in Washington journalism is 'source addiction,' 'access addiction,' and the idea that in order to maintain access to people in the White House or vice president's office or high up in a department, you have to dance to their tune. That's not what journalism is about. We had better sources than she ([Judith Miller](#)) did and we knew who her sources were. They were political appointees who were making a political case. I first met him ([Ahmed Chalabi](#)) in '95 or '96. I wouldn't get dressed in the morning based on what he told me the weather was, let alone go to war. [John Walcott](#)



[Judith Miller](#)



[Ahmed Chalabi](#)



[John Walcott](#)

To keep the cockroaches from coming back, you have to keep spraying and you have to [keep working at it](#) to remain credible and to demonstrate the necessary values-

... Relying on The Times, or McClatchy or any other news source, for all the truth is dumb, but it's infinitely preferable to the pernicious philosophical notions that there is no such thing as truth, that truth is relative, or that, as some journalists seem to believe, it can be found midway between the two opposing poles of any argument ... Does the truth lie halfway between say, slavery and abolition, or between segregation and civil rights, or between communism and democracy? ... The idea that truth is merely a social construct, that it's subjective, in other words, first appeared in academia as a corruption of post-modernism, but it's taken root in our culture without our really realizing it or understanding its implications.

... Although this kind of thinking, relativism and constructivism, started on the left, many conservatives now feel empowered by it, too, and some of them have embraced it with a vengeance on issues ranging from global warming and evolution to the war in Iraq ... There is not one truth for Fox News and another for The Nation. Fair is not always balanced, and balanced is not always fair ... I'm not talking here about matters of taste or of partisan politics or, heaven help us, of faith: Whether Monet or Manet was a better painter or whether Jesus was the Messiah, a prophet or a fraud. Those are personal matters, beliefs, opinions and preferences of which we all must learn to be more tolerant ... Harry G. Frankfurt, an emeritus professor of philosophy at Princeton, puts it this way in a marvelous little book called, "On Truth" (which is the sequel to "On Bullshit"): "It seems ever more clear to me that higher levels of civilization must depend even more heavily on a conscientious respect for the importance of honesty and clarity in reporting the facts, and on a stubborn concern for accuracy in determining what the facts are."



2020, May 27:

<<**Michael Piggott: The current pandemic continues to prompt...cultural heritage institutions to invite documentation...Australia Post has partnered with - curiously - the National Archives of Australia to encourage people to (literally) write letters addressed to "Dear Australia" and have them preserved by NAA. Australia Post says "This will enable all Australians to record their impressions of this remarkable time" ... They've been told where they can send a letter or upload their stuff. Problem solved.>>**

2020, May 28:

Records are timebound in the sense that their meaning is contingent upon what we know now about the circumstances of their formation then (even if then was only 10 seconds ago). Over thirty years ago, David Bearman reminded us of the long term consequences of discontinuity and how perilous such knowledge can be even in the present.

Accustomed as we are to viewing the record as physically fragile and in need of preservation, archivists were unprepared for Foote's two case studies suggesting the intellectual impermanence of recorded memory. The first case reviewed the efforts of an unusual interdisciplinary deliberative body, the Human Interference Task Force of the U.S. Department of Energy, which was charged with developing means to inform persons living 10,000 years from now of the presence of radioactive materials buried by our society. This group of semioticians, linguists, historians and scientists considered every possible way in which to notify the future of the simple fact of the danger of a radioactive site, and while it recommended a combination of markers and written records for such communications, it raised serious doubts about the value of either. The fundamental reason we cannot design a means to assure communications with the future is that human history, human languages, human cultures are too tentative to support communications across such distances of time. Like the electro-mechanical technologies that limit transportability of data in our own era, social technologies and constructs are likely to turn our best constructed messages to noise.

Dr. Foote's second argument was based on case studies of how societies purposefully forget, how they manufacture stigma and efface material evidence in order to erase the past. He examined instances in which the psychological health of a community depended upon forgetting, as in Salem following the witchcraft trials. Foote noted that Germany has eradicated all Nazi party sites because, he suggested, they are far more dangerous to the present society than concentration camps since they reaffirm that the Nazis rose to power through democratic political mechanisms, however skewed and manipulated. One effect of Dr. Foote's work is to bring into crisp focus the shortness of civilized time in the scale of human history, just as paleobiologists so crudely alert us to the brevity of human time in the scale of life. David Bearman, *Archival Methods* (1989) ch. VI

Many years ago, I intervened in a list-serv debate over the impermanence of storage media for electronic records by reporting an archaeological find of ancient correspondence between two court officials named Ham-u-let and Hor-e-teo. Enough could be deciphered for archaeologists to surmise that the officials were lamenting the loss of important data that had been consigned to clay tablets. Repeated references to a "cursed spite" led scholars to hypothesize that a spite was a container for housing clay tablets which became cursed when the necessary religious incantations were incorrectly pronounced over it with the result that tablets crumbled to dust within it. Disparaging references were made to the efforts of a team of despised copyists from Gaza who spent their time duplicating writings from one tablet to another.

2020, June 19: The proper study of mankind

*Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state, A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,*



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*He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest; In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer; Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:*

*Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd; Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
Created half to rise, and half to fall; Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!*

I once heard of an eminent PhD who was asked for his advice on a medical matter. He replied, with withering scorn, “*Madam, I’m not a tradesman!*” How then do we respond to the [proposal](#) to favour vocational education in universities and double the fees for Arts students?

... The announcement by the education minister, Dan Tehan, on Friday that the Morrison government wants to [double student fees for courses in the arts and humanities](#) has horrified academics, and poses real questions about the future of our higher education system. Tehan and the employment minister, [Michaelia Cash](#), are pitching the reforms as an increase in university places and a boost for students ... Tehan will slash university fees for courses like nursing, agriculture, maths, science and information technology ... But fees for courses like creative arts, communications, history, economics, politics, society and culture will in some cases more than double ...

It will be interesting to see how this develops. Will those benefiting welcome the “boost” or join with those deploring the move? Will those with a stake in education be swayed by philosophical considerations or by the grubby prospect of largesse for some and impoverishment for others? Indeed, as the issue shakes down, what will be the arguments in support of the ministers and in opposition? And who will make them?

And where do we stand in the pedagogical landscape. Is recordkeeping an art or a science? A trade or a profession? Should we be concerned about us (our intellectual cred) or for our users who have until recently been humanities focused: historians, genealogists, and other researchers plus hobbyists (not pejorative, but recognising that a lot of users don’t look at archives as part of gainful employment). Presumably our user base is changing as a result of the Internet and demographics (growing numbers of retirees). Does this affect us? Apart from an understandable repugnance for Michaela Cash, should we care? Should a “purist” not even be bothered how archives are used?



Many years ago, I was Education Convener for RMAA (now RIMPA) in Victoria. At that time, the TAFE sector was in turmoil as a result of an earlier round of philistine “reforms” forever associated with the name of the man Dawkins. I got a phone call from someone on the staff of a course in motor engineering (car mechanics). They had been defunded but told that if they could reorganise themselves to teach something else by the following semester they could survive. From a list provided, they had chosen records management. You might not



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believe this, but I swear it actually happened. I dismissed the thought that it was some archivist or records manager playing a practical joke on me. Recordkeepers don't have that kind of wit.

2020, June 22:

Should education be purely vocational? Should university graduates be job-ready? Does anyone read [Newman](#) now? Is there (should there be) a dichotomy between science and the arts? All this has echoes of the [common culture](#) debate and even (possibly) [dualism](#). Does this move devalue the humanities and maybe pure science as well? It does not seem to align exactly (as one might have expected) with recently expressed concerns over a [STEM crisis](#). So far, the commentary that I have seen is of a less exalted kind, accepting the [Tehan/Cash assumptions](#) about the need to focus on vocational training and "skills for new jobs"

these reforms would incentivise students and universities to align with the needs of industry to meet the skill demands for the new economy that will emerge from the pandemic.

Who could argue with that? Universities seem happy to [take the cash](#) (no pun intended) and even to [endorse the ideology](#). The government's move slots easily into the [culture wars](#). The push back (such as it is) is taking the form of a disputes over [equity](#) and over the figures ("anomalies like charging more for a history course but less for librarianship").

2020, June 27:

<<[Mark Brogan](#):... Wondering if anyone has insight to share on implications of the [Tehan changes](#) for our accredited courses? Our largest cohort is at CSU, which in the past has benefited from the availability of low cost Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs), something Library and Information Science (LIS) was able to access because of its placement in a Faculty of Education. It is unclear whether this connection with Education will shield LIS from [Tehan's proposed fee hikes](#). If the changes proceed, Computing and IT is set to be a beneficiary. May be timely for us to consider a sustainable computing and IT pathway to becoming an accredited professional.>>

I have thought for some time that the best fit for us is with [data quality](#).

Data quality refers to the state of qualitative or quantitative pieces of information. There are many definitions of **data quality**, but **data** is generally considered high **quality** if it is "fit for [its] intended uses in operations, decision making and planning".

I have attended some of their conferences and recordkeeping could have been substituted for DQ in many cases. On the downside, DQ (to hear them talk amongst themselves) is itself a bit marginalised within ICT.

2020, June 28:

<<[Mark Brogan](#):.. Data quality sounds to me like a concept from data management and/or stewardship. The join here would be to courses in data science. However, data analytics and the cloud are the main thrust of most data science courses at the moment. Authenticity and reliability of records and data is also a big concern of archivists. The join here would be to digital forensics, usually taught in cyber security. A third shared concern is the persistence of digital memory, which we refer to as digital preservation. This is an acknowledged gap in the curriculum of most computing and IT courses and seems to me to be core knowledge that we would need in any approach to an accreditation pathway for IT professionals...>>

2020, August 13: [News from WA](#)

<<[Joanna Sassoon](#): ... Take care not to choke on your weeties with the [latest cultural news](#) from the edge of empire. For some, this begs the question whether this is the light at the end of the tunnel, or the train coming straight at you?>>



WE ARE WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE

Colin Walker wants to transform the historic institution into a broadcast media organisation, drawing in visitors looking for the perfect backdrop for their selfies ... Mr Walker has plans to turn the gallery into a "broadcast sort of media company that also has a venue". "I want to bring a sense of theatricality," he told [ABC Radio Perth](#)

Many, many years ago, when I was Keeper of Public Records in Victoria, we staged our first ever Open Day. Good turnout, but mostly people who already knew about us. We angled for media coverage and got some print media spots and one TV news team. I escorted the TV reporter and her camera and sound guys around the premises and down into our repository, showing off stuff I thought might be interesting for their audience. As we proceeded, the camera and the sound equipment sagged and the reporter's eyes took on a glazed and faraway look. When they left, I asked what we could do better to engage their interest. She looked at me and said (a bit sheepishly) – "*Well, you see, you don't have anything that moves. On TV you gotta have action.*" Bring on the dancing archives.

Using records as a backdrop for selfies? Didn't think of that one.

2025, January 20: Positionality & the Third Developer

<<Joanna Sassoon: Posted on behalf of Michael Piggott who is not a member of this listserv.

List members might be interested in the following [article](#) just posted to the Taylor & Francis site for JALIA (*Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*). You might say it comes with a 'sensitivity' warning, given the backstory. Early last year a much longer version was invited by an international archives journal, assessed via a double-blind process and rejected outright. Later last year a shorter version was accepted in principle by an Australian archives journal explicitly as a reflection/opinion piece, only to be rejected unless split and the first half sent for peer review. *JALIA* had no qualms, and I thank its editor Dr Mary Anne Kennan for allowing it to appear. Incidentally, *JALIA* is one of the very few journals now in Australia which regularly reviews archives texts. Michael Piggott>>

2025, January 21:

I'm not surprised the peer reviewers wanted to split Michael's essay. It seems to be about two different things. But I can see a connection – perhaps not one Michael would approve of.

KEITH PENNY

He had a wicked sense of humour, a fine mind, an instinct for favouritism, and he was temperamentally unfit to be a leader of our profession. I can say that last thing because it is also true of me. Like Groucho, I didn't want to be part of a club that would accept me as a member. In quite a different way, that could also be said of Keith Penny. People tell me he was shy. Not a bit of it. He was reclusive because he feared to face the judgement of the unrefined.

I was briefly invited into the charmed circle of "preferred subordinates and colleagues". Keith quickly concluded that I was unworthy of it and I quickly concluded that I didn't want to be part of it. When I returned from London in 1975, I was physically consigned to a ghostly exile on Northbourne Ave along with Lindsay Cleland who was also in disgrace at that time. Bob Neale's arrival soon put an end to that nonsense.

In 1974, Keith had put me forward (reluctantly) as Archives' semi-official representative in the process of forming ASA. The tentative nature of the appointment was characteristic. He knew we couldn't stand aloof but also quailed at a whole-hearted commitment. He confided to me the reason (insofar as he was able to confide anything). When Ian Maclean had his break-down, young Keith was summoned before the legendary Geoff Yeend (head of Prime Minister's). He was told he would have to step up and they would support him, but he must on no account "embarrass the Department". That became his *positionality*.



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I was cautioned against getting too close to archivists from the States, the universities, and other sundries. They didn't know how to behave in a manner that would not embarrass the Department so we had to keep our distance. The only exception he seemed to make was (curiously) Harry Nunn. That was a watershed moment for me. The door was still open to my becoming one of the "preferred subordinates and colleagues" but the price was too high. That way madness lay.

I had an unusual career path in the '70s. A stint in a major department (DSS) taught me that all I'd been told about the superior abilities required of the mandarins (beyond the ken of archival riff-raff) was so much b/s. There were highly competent men and women there, but any skilled archivist could more than hold his own. My time on drafting the *Archives Bill* told me I could too. After that, I could not even consider adopting a positionality of deference.

My time in Victoria taught me that, try as we might, we could never attain the support and regard from our masters that we thought we deserved. We could only work to our strengths and do our best but always (as Frank Upward once said to me) driven by a secret motive – not to please them but a dedication to the preservation and use of knowledge. In that pursuit, it might sometimes even be necessary to embarrass the Department.



POSITIONALITY

Not having the support and regard from our masters that we think we deserve, it is tempting to find comfort in the regard of those who need us most, who can understand our importance to them and appreciate our support. But when this takes the form of elite fetishes critiquing "imperial, racial and societal power relationships" and articulating "ideas about community archives, appraisal, activism [in] an almost confessional transparency about identity" we must recognise the danger of estranging the wider community we also serve and guard against that danger. Diversity and Inclusion are important but they are trivialised by delivery of a keynote on one's knee and by bickering over pronouns. Sensible people can see the silliness and taking that positionality cripples our ability to serve them as we should.

It will surprise no one to learn that I am deeply suspicious of personal introductions identifying the race or identity to which one belongs. I have an abiding, old-fashioned belief in the virtue of striving to ensure that it shouldn't matter. There is legitimate room for debate over whether such a struggle can ever succeed or is even desirable. There is a legitimate case to be made that special efforts must be made to make unaccustomed users more comfortable. For me, however, self-identification is a surrender to one side of that debate and a denial of an outstanding quality needed for us to do what we do. It is the virtue that dare not speak its name: objectivity.



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Is there a conflict between social virtue and ethical recordkeeping? Of course not. Records are made and kept and used for many reasons – some good, some not. For a while, some archivists argued the virtues of r/keeping in the service of accountability. I have been one. [Some archives still do.](#)

Our work strengthens trust in democracy and improves government transparency and accountability by connecting Australians to government decisions and activities.

But that is not to define the essential qualities and purpose of recordkeeping, cf.

The evolving role of government archives in democratic societies (2001)

which is about truth and accuracy, not subservience to some extraneous purpose. Whether or not our essential role is brought into conflict with the needs or desires of makers-or-keepers-or-users depends, as always, on circumstance, cf.

The Heiner Affair.

We may be agnostic or we may be committed. It makes little difference to our core “values”. Promoting the reparative uses of records or adjusting for disparities in the way they are made is perfectly OK so long as it is done in the service of truth and accuracy.

QUO VADIS?

Must our choice of *positionality* (insofar as we have a choice) be between craven subservience to our betters or to the boutique virtues of uplifting the marginalised, the persecuted, and the hitherto ignored? Teachers cannot live only to meet the needs of the intellectually gifted, they also have to try to gain the attention of the kid who only wants to be off surfing (perhaps more so). Archivists spread their resources thinly over many different spaces, but our positioning must confront the whole of a big, scary world - not just a cozy corner of it.

It is more comfortable to have modest ambitions but less true to our calling. I chose early on not to live my life in a cocoon.

2025, January 25:

Our *positionality* is not simply philosophical. It is, at its most basic, how we relate to the world – how we are perceived, how we engage, not just how we treat customers, buyers, patrons, clients, users ... That involves understanding not just who we are, but also the environment in which we operate. According to [one analyst](#), public services stretch back to Rome (harbours, public markets, public baths), reappeared in the Early Modern Period (canal construction, road paving, tax farming), and have been on a roller coaster ride ever since. There is a [recent trend](#) is back towards private. This from the [Fourth International](#):

The New South Wales (NSW) public mental health system is in a state of chaos and confusion, with around one-third of the state's 295 permanently employed specialist psychiatrists quitting to protest the Labor government's refusal to meet their pay demands and dozens more threatening to resign in the coming weeks ... The NSW Labor government is refusing to move ... What the psychiatrists are up against is a state Labor government that is determined to slash real wages, working conditions and spending on vital public services, including health. With the collaboration of the unions, the NSW government has imposed successive real wage cuts across broad swathes of the public sector, including nurses, midwives and other health workers ...

Far from pressuring the government to concede, the mass resignation of staff psychiatrists offers the Labor government an easy opportunity to accelerate a process that is already well underway—the piecemeal privatisation of public health ... Hospitals and local health districts have become increasingly reliant on Visiting Medical Officers (VMOs), physicians who maintain a private practice but work on temporary contracts with public



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health facilities ... The Labor government has reportedly contacted private sector hospitals, asking them to provide details on spare-bed capacity and their ability to begin admitting mentally ill patients from public hospitals ...

The current trajectory set by the ASMOF [the union representing the psychiatrists] will most likely result in the majority of staff psychiatrists withdrawing their resignations and returning to work, with none of their demands met ... This will worsen the already impossible conditions in public mental health ... Other health unions are completely on board with this ... Central to every attack on the jobs, wages and conditions of medical staff is the ongoing privatisation and casualisation of public health, imposed continuously over decades by Labor and Liberal-National governments throughout the country, with the full assistance of the unions ...

In the fight for [their] demands, psychiatrists and health staff will run up against a major obstacle—the capitalist profit system ... Overcoming this will require a political struggle against capitalism and all of its organs, including Labor and the unions, and the fight for an alternative: socialism ...

Their agenda is radicalisation as ours is the *positionality* we choose and our agenda(s) necessarily straddle(s) the public/private divide. There may be something to their analysis of the underlying forces reversing the development of public services and public enterprises – begun insofar as social welfare goes (since we moved on from the parish, the workhouse, and the lunatic asylum) with Disraeli and Bismarck and in retreat (here) since the era of Hawke/Keating. To put it brutally, it may be to our (professional) best interest to adjust the balance of our thinking between *social virtues* and *not embarrassing the Department* because, despite the wishes of the Fourth International, that balance is shifting towards non-government.

Of course, full privatisation might ultimately see government r/keeping take that road also. Why not? Commercial storage, private sector consultants, independent standard-setting and auditing, Visiting Archives Officers (VAOs) to inspect government archives “collections” preserved in museums? One thing you could never say about Marx is that he lacked breadth of vision.

2025, January 26:

**<< To put it brutally, it may be to our (professional) best interest
to adjust the balance of our thinking between *social virtues*
and *not embarrassing the Department* ...>>**

In the spirit of Heisenberg, I have come (in my old age) to have a grudging respect for [*indeterminism*](#)

... the only causes that exist are of a type that do not constrain the future to a single course
... a necessary condition does not lead to a single inevitable effect ...

The philosophers have speculated that [*cultural identity*](#) is a way of understanding ourselves

... a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. This process involves learning about and accepting [*traditions*](#), [*heritage*](#), [*language*](#), [*religion*](#), [*ancestry*](#), [*aesthetics*](#), thinking patterns, and [*social structures*](#) of a culture. Normally, people internalize the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices of their culture and identify themselves with that culture. The culture becomes a part of their [*self-concept*](#).

Then, ideas about [*social identity*](#)

... the portion of an individual's [*self-concept*](#) derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group

tie us more explicitly to “social structures” as determinants of self-knowledge.

The term [*positionality*](#) asserts that these determinants are hidden from us and takes matters from the descriptive to the normative



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... social positions ... influence how we interact with the world ... e.g. race, ethnicity, class, gender, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, educational attainment, (dis)ability, nationality, and sexual orientation ... Social positions ... are different from identity. {They} are socially-constructed by the world around us and may not always reflect our true identities

... Positionality influences our perception of the world, how we engage with others, and how others interact with us ... Reflection on positionality is meant to be an iterative, constant process. Our positions change over time, so we must continuously reflect on our positions and how they interact with our environment ... Choosing to work towards uplifting all perspectives, diversifying our work, and advocating for equity is true positionality ...

critics [alleging](#) that

Positionality statements [are] "research segregation", "positional piety", and "loyalty oaths" ... an author may claim moral authority through affinity with subjects, or through a confession of difference of relative privilege. This has given rise to the concern that positionality statements can lead to "positional piety", where researchers are considered more or less credible based on race, gender, or other characteristics.

or, in the alternative, just seeming to be virtuous (and more far-seeing) by acknowledging one's own bias(es).

As a [positivist](#) and an indeterminist, I prefer to focus on a [positioning](#) strategy -

"the place a brand occupies in the mind of its target audience"

That may, of course, include an unabashed adoption of "positional piety" when it is advantageous to do so in a market place that looks for that sort of thing from us and hence an adjustment to "the balance of our thinking".

2025, February 4:

You might think this is as fine [an example of parallel provenance](#) as you'll find this side of Wonderland:

Google made headlines by announcing [it will update](#) Google Maps as soon as the name is changed in official government sources, in accordance with its "longstanding practice." The name change will only apply to users in the U.S., Google added. Users in Mexico will continue to see "Gulf of Mexico." "Also longstanding practice: When official names vary between countries, Maps users see their official local name. Everyone in the rest of the world sees both names. That applies here too," the company explained.

We are told that:

All information is a cultural artefact, and derived from the societal and linguistic semantic, and intellectual structures in which it is/was created. I find working with Techies, that the lack of anthropological/sociological understanding, and basic epistemology, tautology, and socio-contextual comprehension leads to a very odd conception of what information and data actually is, ie a social construct, and a reflection of centuries of mores, conceptual/academic/legal/religio-political thought, human-interaction, and behavioural norms. It what possible universe could this most uniquely human expressions of mind become considered to be neutral?

The entire Westen apparatus of data and information systems is rooted in Judeo-Christian, white, academic, middle class, and male modes of operation, with all the inherent biases and world-views instrisically embedded. It's utterly baffling, anyone could think otherwise!

This is why we need ontology to map concepts across cultures, as well as across technology systems, data models and management structures.

[Stephen Clarke](#) on LinkedIn

Human "expressions of mind" are simply expressions of [human nature](#) (ways of thinking, feeling, and acting) which may be innate or malleable (? nature or nurture). If Techies really believe that any expression of human nature is "neutral", they are indeed deluded. Belief in



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neutrality is, of course, quite different from a belief in objectivity (the virtue that dare not speak its name). Objectivity is not something that is inherent in information but something to be striven for in its formulation and management. Whether or not that is achievable is the point of departure.

That information is a social construct is obvious enough. The idea that it is rooted in a singular “mode of operation with ... inherent biases and world-views intrinsically embedded” is itself a social construct – a judgement about the quality of **all** information and a breathtakingly sweeping one. Information is constructed by many hands. What I find breathtaking is the idea that **all** information is uniformly biased. People just aren’t that homogenous (thank God). What Clarke is really saying (I suppose) is that “*a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest*” ([Paul Simon](#)) and that Western “modes of operation” are/have been dominant (but only for the last four centuries or so and things are moving on).

But there is no reason to suppose that other cultures, themselves also emanations of human nature, are any less biased. So what? More importantly, [Western culture](#) is “internally diverse”, not at all the uniform, dominating monolith that the virtuous would have it to be. To paraphrase [George V](#), *I may be dominant but I’ll be damned if I’m congruent*. Those who think it is have simply turned a [social construction](#) of their own making into a bogey-man against which to measure their own virtue.

And all those other cultures that have stood the test of time are also internally diverse. Indeed, it is not too much of a stretch to argue that unless a culture is internally diverse it’s unlikely to survive for long. Bodes ill for social constructs that aren’t.

Bias is a human characteristic. It needs no theory of social constructs to tell us this. In our world (our part of the world, that is), we need every tool we can find to deal with it, ontology being one. The Google approach is entirely passive: they accept conflicting expressions of thought and re-present them according to the different audiences they serve. It might be said that they are thus reinforcing prejudices – telling people what they “*want to hear*” based on their identity. Parallel provenance operates on a slightly different basis because it involves the compiler intervening, making judgements, and presenting alternative (equally valid) views of the same phenomena (cf. [cartographers for social equality](#)). Google comes close with “*Everyone in the rest of the world sees both names*” but they would do better to show both names in Mexico and the US too.

But what if competing views are not equally valid? Ah, well. The balance between observation and judgement is an eternally difficult and fascinating one.

2025, February 12:

<<It will surprise no one to learn that I am deeply suspicious of personal introductions identifying the race or identity to which one belongs. I have an abiding, old-fashioned belief in the virtue of striving to ensure that it shouldn’t matter.>>

Convalescing at home after surgery, I am digging out some old DVDs and reprising them before that technology too becomes obsolete. In [Almost Australian](#) (Part 2: “Mateship”) Miriam Margolyes finds herself in a truck stop 100K south of Alice Springs talking with some rough, sweaty, blokey Okkers in a pub run by one of them (name of Spud). “*Are you married?*” Spud asks. “*No, I’m a lesbian,*” she replies. “*Have you ever met one of them before?*” “*Oh s**t yeah,*” Spud says. “*What do you call them?*” she asks. “*By name,*” Spud says. “*You don’t say dykes, or things like that?*” “*No, you call them by name.*”

Later on, Miriam reflects:



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I'm not looking for a tribe. I don't need a tribe ... I'm perfectly happy for people who have tribes to go and enjoy them and be secure within that tribe. But I run from that ... Absolutely run from it.

Comrade!



PS. My friend Barbara (knowing that my phone is specifically not built to be smart and that my technological competence falls just short of *Press Button A, Now*) tells me there is some “good stuff around in this new media” and suggests I might find [Spotify for Windows](#) within my range. Building up to it.

PPS. I guess old-timers like me and Miriam won't be around much longer to disturb the tribalism of positionality.



2016, April 6: ...”Repositioning the ASA for the next 40 Years”...

FW: Check out "Repositioning the ASA for the next 40 Years" on Archives Live

The paper covers what we are (or should be) trying to achieve, what we are (or should be) doing to achieve it, and how we are (or should be) going about it. It integrates some really useful problem analysis of our past and current state with conclusions about where to go and detailed proposals for how to do it. I think there is a lot of cart-before-the-horse in this. Getting bogged down in the detail of reconstruction (the how) before we have fully analysed the problem, set out options and alternatives, and debated what it is we are trying to achieve (the why) simply confuses those of us who aren't necessarily in accord with the authors' conclusions. So, I would argue for a process to be set up in which this offering can be treated accordingly.

I am actually confused about whether this is a proposal for an overhaul of the existing model or a proposal for its replacement by something else. The reason for this confusion is that the thread of the argument seems to me to slip-and-slide around between strategic matters one moment to nuts-and-bolts mechanics the next. The focus keeps changing. Example : Associate membership. The paper seems to say we want it to continue (a why proposition) but the two categories of membership (the how proposition) don't provide for it unless it is proposed that what were professionals and associates should merge into “Standard” Membership. If so, what is the value of membership to someone who doesn't work at r/keeping such that they should pay the same fee as those employed in the field? Most of the gradations in the fee structure for individuals are based on career progression but associates don't have a career progression because they don't work in r/keeping. Most of the “benefits” of individual membership that are enumerated are for those employed in



r/keeping. Why should someone who is not professionally employed in r/keeping (for whom those “benefits” do not apply) not have that difference recognised in the fee structure?

This leads to a deeper question : who or what is the ASA for? It is now (at least nominally) an association of –

- those professionally employed in r/keeping (or some aspects of it) having the twofold objective of promoting objects that such persons support (a what rather than who purpose) and of accreditation (a who purpose); and
- those persons and institutions that also support those objectives (a what purpose).

The proposed model refocusses much more on the career, knowledge, and competency needs of those working in the field (a who purpose). To my mind, this narrows the target membership when we should be looking at ways of broadening it.

The 1975 aspiration of accrediting and controlling the professional workplace is no longer feasible (maybe never was) yet our activities over the last 40 years have trapped us into upholding a straight-jacket of professional competencies and standards linked to a particular view of “archives-and-records” when arguably (the paper does argue this) our focus needs to be adjusted. But how adjusted? It is much harder to do if we go for a re-emphasis on knowledge-and-competency as the association’s purpose because the answer is not obvious (nor, I suspect, uncontested). Every step towards RIM takes us away from GLAM and every concession to GLAM blurs our commitment to RIM. I have a different take on the authors’ identification of the ICT areas onto which we should now be professionally refocussing (technology vs content, plumbing vs water quality) but the problem, not analysed so far as I can see, is how we go about transitioning away from our historical RIM focus even if it were possible to discard some of our intellectual and historical baggage. But before asking how we need to carefully and completely analyse what new focus we want.

Then there is the problem that, whatever we might choose to re-focus on as a profession, most of our current professional members (or potential members) are employed by a very few big institutions whose own focus is characteristically unstable (I might also say archaic but that would be provocative) and may be different to whatever we might now want to re-focus on. This is another aspect of “who are we for?” If we are mostly employees in a few big archives institutions, then we are captive to their ideologies. If their employees are only a fraction of our potential membership then the institutions’ views don’t matter (so much). Many of our potential members won’t be pursuing careers in “archives-and-records” – that won’t be their job title. It follows that many of them will not, in fact, be employed (or potentially employed) in the institutions. Instead, they will be holding down jobs in which r/keeping skills can be usefully deployed but will not be the only job requirement. It might, however, be the competitive advantage that they can bring to the job that differentiates their skill set from that of other applicants. How do our potential members relate to that professional challenge? How do we help them to do it and adjust our focus to deal with it as their professional body?

In short : I have different ideas about who the ASA is (or should be) for which would lead down a different path to reconstruction. I imagine others have yet more ideas that are different again to mine and to those in the discussion paper. I know for sure that Peter Crush does. This is a discussion paper and belongs on the table with other discussion papers when (and if) we launch into that debate. But it is too soon (far, far too soon) to be talking about membership categories, fee structures, services for members, voting privileges and the like. So, my view is this : let this paper stand (and start discussing it by all means) but find a way of getting other papers on the table with a view to developing a real options paper and then set up processes that enable us to discuss the why before we get on to the how.



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PS. Better still, split this paper in two : one being a framework document (problem analysis, options, etc.) that can be a capstone for other proposals and the other being a specific set of proposals to lie on the table along with alternative options.

2016, April 7:

<<**Kylie Perceval:** ... We were hoping the paper would provoke some outward-looking discussion and to that extent the strategic scene-setting and a proposed response were deliberately combined for members' consideration. Some people relish a blank piece of paper; while others would prefer to have something to pull apart and rebuild into something new ...>>

2016, April 22:

<<**Peter Crush:** ... My repositioning would include a change of name of the ASA to the 'Australian Society of Archivists and Record Keepers'.

I would remove the 'Institutional' class of membership

I would remove the nexus between professional membership and any 'recognised archives', relying on periods of experience in records work and formal qualifications to underpin 'professional' or 'registered' membership.

The Society would be open to all who have an interest in the proper management and use of records and archives, with particular emphasis on the advancement of the profession that embraces 'archivists', 'records managers' and 'recordkeepers'.

I perceive there to be distinct differences in the work-a-day orientation and priorities of records managers and archivists, while acknowledging that the skills, experiences and qualifications of both can be found in single individuals who I would call 'recordkeepers'.

It is my feeling that a Society focused on the development and support of a clearly defined 'profession' (not based only on being in paid employment in the field) made up of qualified and experienced records managers, archivists and recordkeepers would grow, particularly if it was exposed and promoted to all those individuals in society who perform those roles.

Records managers, archivists and recordkeepers perform their work (frequently in the guise of many other designations) in all entities where records are created and maintained.

I think the GLAM aggregation has, to some degree, been accentuated because many 'lone arrangers' are called upon to perform all of these specialisations. There is a perception 'out there' that they belong together, or perhaps it is that they are esoteric. The characteristics (depending to a greater or lesser degree on scale) that appear to link galleries, libraries, archives and museums together are that they are public, educational, entertaining and important social institutions, particularly in democracies. These characteristics apply to the archival institution at the public interface. For most records managers, archivists and recordkeepers there is little or no public interface.

It is the vast number of specialist record workers across the whole of society that the ASA should be repositioning itself to support. If done well, membership numbers would be the least of the Society's concern.

Changes in technology and society are extending the boundaries of the knowledge, skills and experience required by records managers, archivists and recordkeepers to enable them to continue to add value to society. Education must continue to be a priority in this repositioning exercise.>>

2016, April 25:

<<**Greg Slattery:** ... Sure hope that someone takes heed of the precise and concise views from the much respected Peter Crush to address the concerns for the future ... Peter's summation of the roles of those in GLAM sector is enlightening and encouraging.>>





What We Do

2016, August 31: Relic or archive

**<<Joanna Sassoon: How does this fit with the definition of an archive?
Dutch explorer's dish detailing Australia's earliest
known European contact returning for exhibition>>**

What is the definition of an archive? Why can't it be both? It's a relic when it's regarded as such and an archive when it is so treated. The difference lies not in the **essence** of the thing but in how it's regarded and treated.



The St Kilda Light Rail is a tram when it's in the CBD mingling with other trams and a train when it mounts the old St Kilda train tracks. Some argue that it can't be a train because the signalling was pulled out but I think the reverse is true. The signalling was pulled out and because it is a train (and continues, whatever it's called, to behave like a train and not a tram) there are end-to-end collisions (which you get when heavy vehicles, uncontrolled by signals, hurtle towards each other in the same block of space) and these are quite different to tram-jams where the vehicles snuggle up against each other. I speak feelingly because I was on board when the very first of these rear-end collisions occurred after they decommissioned the St Kilda Rail Line, and I've been able to use this metaphor ever since.

The Light Rail story illustrates (I think) that the categories (relic/archive; train/tram) are not water-tight or mutually exclusive. Curators managing relics will incorporate archiving in their practices and vice versa. I would expect more divergence in the underlying theory of curating and archiving but I'm guessing a bit. If I was asked to say what that difference is, I would answer that a relic is a thing of intrinsic qualities whereas an archive (properly understood) is a thing of extrinsic qualities.

intrinsic

1. belonging to a thing by its very nature: *the intrinsic value of a gold ring.*
2. *Anatomy.* (of certain muscles, nerves, etc.) belonging to or lying within a given part.

extrinsic

1. not essential or inherent; not a basic part or quality; extraneous: *facts that are extrinsic to the matter under discussion.*
2. being outside a thing; outward or external; operating or coming from without: *extrinsic influences.*
3. *Anatomy.* (of certain muscles, nerves, etc.) originating outside the anatomical limits of a part.

Dictionary.com



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In the instant case, the intrinsic qualities are rarity, antiquity, pedagogy, historical associations, triumphalism, trophy-ism, etc. The extrinsic qualities are the connections between the artefact(s) and a process of marking and memorialising Dutch exploration and discovery (I'm guessing a bit, again). Alternatively, the plate held by the WA Museum could be regarded as booty – in archival terms as an estray, having been a record of Willem de Vlamingh's voyage into which the Hartog Plate had been top-numbered before the latter was "archived" back to Holland. Surely these are not original thoughts. Someone must have researched all this.

<<**Michael Piggott**: Good question Joanna, and I definitely agree with Chris's point that a pewter plate can be both record and museum object. As it happens Eric Ketelaar wrote on this very matter in 2008 in "Exploration of the archived world: from De Vlamingh's Plate to digital realities"

(see <http://cf.hum.uva.nl/bai/home/eketelaar/Exploration.pdf>).

All of which prompts the question if the Hartog is the oldest European/Australian record, and given the current practice of representing a period of history in a set number of objects (eg the BM's history of the world in a 100 objects), what 10 artifacts might be nominated to represent the history of Australian archives and recordkeeping? Starting with Hartog's plate.>>

2016, September 1:

<<**Tim Robinson**: ... I'm not sure where on the list it should come, but the Type 1 box has to be in it ☺>>

... Might we not extend the term of our recorded history and considerably widen our contextual framework by noticing artefacts that memorialise activities and circumstances from the Indigenous/Australian record as well as the European/Australian record? Amongst the many articles and conference papers on related matters, surely someone has attempted to define (in concrete, rather than poetic terms) the character and boundaries of that concept.

2016, September 2:

<<**Michael Piggott**: Yes we, especially in Australia given our shared indigenous/European heritage, should indeed include artefacts which memorialise activities and circumstances. Certainly the ASA's current definition/s are badly dated. As to where is an appropriate definition, there are numerous pieces of writing which discuss this rather than actually attempt a pluralised culturally inclusive definition. Should we even try? Maybe it's just my current mood, but perhaps we should just stick with bland statements like the one which opens the ICA's Universal Declaration on Archives ("Archives record decisions, actions and memories") and otherwise leave it up to communities to say what they think their archives are. For all that, Chris's "surely someone has attempted .." challenge remains, and I'll keep looking.>>

2016, September 21:

<<**Michael Piggott**: In case there is any appetite to continue this challenge (and of course excluding instances of actual famous Australian records such as those generated by Torrens Title land registration, and Vlamingh's Plate), here is the beginnings of my list, incorporating Tim's suggestion:

1. a generic aboriginal message stick (though there should be many more objects to precede the European Australian list to represent one of the world's earliest recordkeeping cultures)
2. a Type I archives box (developed by ???; some say Ian Maclean)
3. a Black Box flight recorder (developed by Dave Warren in 1958)
4. a notepad (developed by J. A. Birchall in 1902 in Launceston)



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5. a first-past-the-post camera to separate near dead heats in horse racing (developed Bertram Pearl and Athol Shmith in 1948)
6. the 1918 memorial plaque (at the AWM) to Corporal Ernest Bailey, probably the first Australian archivist to die on duty.
7. an example of copying technology from various generations (a copying press, a photocopier etc)>>

2016, September 1: Living Traces Parragirls Artist Book & Print Exhibition ...

<<**Joanne Evans**: An upcoming exhibition in the lead up to the ASA Conference in Parramatta **LIVING TRACES Parragirls Artist Book and Print Exhibition 25 Sept – 2 Oct 2016 Opening Saturday 24 Sept 4–6pm**

Living Traces, our third curated exhibition at Parramatta Girls Home since 2013, is the result of the Parragirls' collaboration with artists' book producers Gwen Harrison and Sue Anderson.

An important aspect of the project is the opportunity to address the systemic abuse of children in Australian detention centres, both in juvenile justice and off-shore facilities. The former residents of Parramatta Girls Home attest to this punitive approach as central to the operations of the institution. The findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in early 2017 will bring further evidence to public awareness and the Parragirls' creative testimony of institutionalisation and this exhibition is a vital bridge between what the government considers reparative justice and its lived experience. Living Traces captures otherwise unrecorded memories of the institution, buried under trauma and shame, before they are lost forever.

Please see the [attached media release](#) for details.>>



Images of workshops and work in progress. Photo credit: Lucy Parakhina

2017, December 5: Where have all the file clerks gone?

A [report in the Weekend Australian](#) on the results of the 2016 census concerning Jobs compares occupations that are increasing as a percentage of the workforce and those that are in decline.

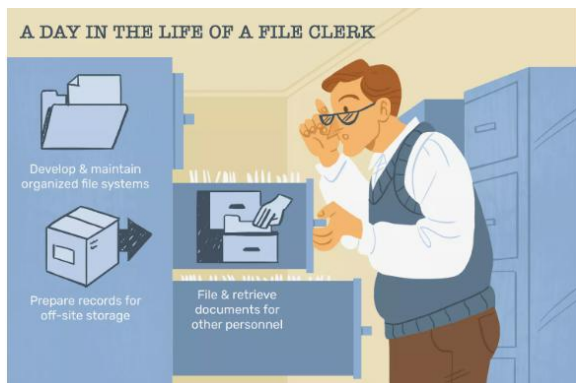
There's no category for archivist or recordkeeper but there has been a drop of 25% in **Filing or registry clerks** since 2011 – down by 4,029 to 12,271. The largest drop was for **Charter and tour bus drivers** which I find surprising and perhaps suggests that the statistical variation is in how people choose to characterize themselves rather than how people are actually employed (but I'm no statistician).

... Most growth is delivered in the largest single job category, sales assistant (general), which added 69,100 workers over five years to reach a base of 526,000 workers in 2016. Other big-growth jobs include aged or disabled carer, up 24,100 workers between 2011 and 2016; chef, up 23,100 workers; domestic cleaner, up 20,700 workers; and kitchen hand, up 17,200 workers. These five occupations added 154,000 workers during the past five years, or about



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30,000 net extra jobs per year...At the opposite end of the ranking is a collection of skills that are contracting. Most losses apply to the job of secretary, down 19,200 or 36 per cent over five years to 34,000 in 2016...The reason secretaries are shrinking is because senior management has finally learnt how to type. Plus, with email there is an audit trail of who said what to whom, and so the traditional role of secretary has changed. But this does not mean that there are 19,000 unemployed secretaries resentfully sitting at home and fomenting revolution. The agile life form of secretaries is adapting to environmental change...Jobs with the fewest workers include bungy jump master (we have a total of eight in the workforce), hunting guide (nine) and trekking guide (21). Ten new jobs were added to the workforce classification this census, including kennel hand (1221), archeologist (426) and intellectual property lawyer (736). Interestingly, we have 495 historians, down from 527 in 2006, but not a single futurist...



File Clerk



Secretary

Perhaps file clerks are disappearing for the same reason as secretaries – viz. because “with email there is an audit trail of who said what to whom, and so the traditional role ... has changed”. So, now we know: we no longer need secretaries (or file clerks) because email systems keep meticulous records!!!!

2017, December 7:

<<**Michael Piggott**: Chris' interesting post raises all sorts of questions. Given what's been happening to the government sector, then where, typically, do the 12,000 filing or registry clerks work today? (Solicitors offices? Banks? Airlines? Horse studs? Police stations? Defence units? Blood banks? Hospitals and medical centres?) And given that records and recordkeeping is a business necessity regardless of employment labels, what is the work (or component of a more general work role) of filing or registry clerks called in 2017. And if something is disguised by a broader or less meaningful or more current work label - one which differs from the terms (eg records) used in legislation and standards and education and training - how well will it be done?>>

2018, March 9: **Alas! I'm only an expert**

Aficionados of *Yes Minister* will recall the character of Dr Cartwright who knows everything about local government but will rise no higher because “*Alas, I'm an expert*”.

Also the episode in which an expiring contract goes wrong under Scottish law because the official in charge many years ago (Sir Humphrey) wasn't a lawyer and didn't know the difference; he explains that he would never have been put in charge of the legal section if he had been a lawyer.



Dr Cartwright (an expert)



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When I was in Victoria in the 1980s in charge of PROV, I once had a lecture from the departmental head of the day on why a professional archivist should not head up a government archives programme –

“we don’t want engineers in charge of planning the construction of bridges,”
he said (in all seriousness).

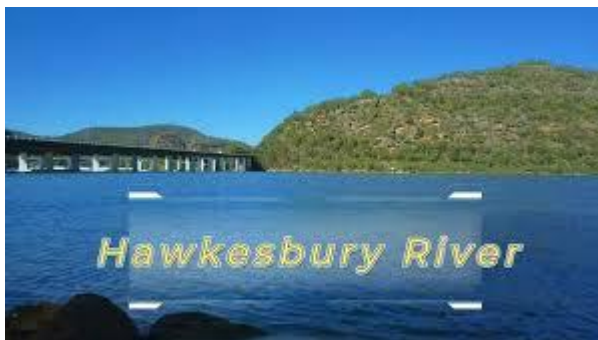
In an episode of *The Games*, Brian (who knows about transport) has to fend off a gaggle of amateurs (who know nothing about it or, seemingly, much about anything else) who are screwing up planning for transportation at the Olympics. An article in [today’s SMH](#) resonates:

The NSW government decision to buy more than \$2 billion in new trains that are unable to fit through tunnels in the Blue Mountains would have been better thought through if the government had embraced engineering safeguards that have been proposed for several years. Believe it or not, anyone in NSW can call themselves an engineer and there is no requirement that engineering advice be taken into account during the conception and development of major projects like this one This week, Roads and Maritime Services sent an instruction to staff saying technical engineering standards on road projects may need to be “traded off” in order to meet other demands. The email says that: “not all technical standards are absolutes, they involve trade offs” and that some standards “have trade offs in terms of cost, speed of construction and customer impact”.

Up to a point, this is true. Yes, all risk management is a trade-off. The thing of it is that risk assessment is work for experts and they need to be listened to. The article continues:

.. This government has relegated engineering advice and standards to an afterthought when they should be central to decisions to make sure mistakes don’t happen. Cost blow-outs are one consequence of non-engineers making engineering decisions on major projects, but far more concerning are the public safety risks. Our power systems, water systems, buildings, roads and rail, all rely on engineers. As you read this, major projects across the state are happening under the guidance of people who are not qualified engineers, putting the public at risk ...

As a regular user of a railway bridge across the Hawkesbury that is routinely reported to be dangerously decayed and on which regular repair and maintenance work appears to have been “traded off” under less than absolute standards, I have a vested interest in this matter.



PS. Civil War buffs will recall that McClellan’s long-delayed Peninsula Campaign broke down on the first day when it was found that the barges carrying troops down the Potomac were just a bit too wide to fit through the locks. McClellan was a superb organiser but slow to move and Lincoln had chafed for months at the delays. He is said to have remarked drily that he supposed that, with all the organisation that had been going on, someone might have found the time to measure the locks.

PPS. Recordkeeping examples abound. You will all know what I mean. To take but one example. Over forty years, I have had the all-or-nothing (aka things-are-sometimes-more-complicated-than-you-might-suppose) discussion with non-experts (often consultants, ministerial advisers, or IT folk) over and over and over again. Take disposal. The amateurs



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want a single, simple, global disposal rule (e.g. for email). You try to tell them: you don't appraise format, you appraise content (better still you appraise function and process). Huh? That requires classification and redesign (and maintenance). But we want to set-and-forget and move on to the next project; besides, classification is out of scope. Sorry, but Risk, Compliance, and Archives all agree that some emails must be kept for longer than 7 years (but not all need to be kept that long). How can we tell which is which? You need classification. But classification is out of scope. And so it goes. Sometimes they just can't be bothered and end up retaining all emails for 100 years or so and leave it at that until storage runs out and the important stuff is buried in sludge. But you don't have to do that, you say; the quantity of email traffic that needs to be kept is relatively small and keeping more than you have to creates other kinds of risk. How can we know? Well, you need classification of some kind. Hmmm. Classification is out of scope. ☹

<<**Michael Piggott: Chris' post reminds me of recent troubles at Apple's clever new building in California, again where expert advice was dismissed. Thus:**

"Employees in Apple Park, Apple's grand new spaceship-style headquarters in California, keep walking into glass doors and windows. Despite warnings from a building inspector that people would not be able to tell where the door ends and the wall begins, at least three Apple employees walked or ran into the ultra-transparent glass hard enough to require emergency medical treatment during the first month of occupation, according to recordings of 911 calls obtained by the San Francisco Chronicle.">>

2018, March 12: When is an archives a nuisance?

When defining the word "archives", it is customary to distinguish between the building (or institution) and the material housed therein –

a place in which public records or historical materials (such as documents) are preserved : an *archive* of historical manuscripts, a film *archive*
also : the material preserved —often used in plural reading through the *archives*

The distinction is highlighted in a current news story from abroad in which an archives building is being hired out for events. Apparently NAUK is hiring out its Richmond/Kew premises as a licensed venue and is now seeking to extend the hours in which it can operate as licensed premises.

The National Archives is applying to become a fully licensed venue, with live music and extended opening hours for the whole week.

The application seeks to allow, every day of the week, for the sale of alcohol from 12pm to 11pm, the premises to play films, live and recorded music from 9pm to 11pm, and to extend opening hours to 11.30pm. There is currently a bar in the venue, which opens at 5pm on a Friday only, but this is and will be run separately. When making the decision the planning committee must decide whether the change will be a "public nuisance", cause "crime and disorder", decrease public safety or cause harm to children.



If approved, the licensed premises could operate every day of the week from noon to 11pm (but NAUK suggests it would only be on special occasions).

It is worth noting that opening hours for less potentially annoying activities (? such as research) are

- ♦ 9-7 (Tue & Thu),
- ♦ 9-5 (Wed, Fri, Sat), and
- ♦ closed Sundays and Mondays.



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Neighbours are not happy with the proposal and are specifically concerned with noise pollution and parking ... “We know the noise impact from the NA from the few events held throughout the year” Another resident said: “When the venue has held events in the past year we can hear the music from inside our house because the National Archives building does not have sufficient sound insulation fitted to limit the impact on nearby residents.” Parking was also an issue, with some concerned that residents would be “battling for spaces” when events are on...

2018, May 8: Curator of killed images

What a terrific job title! Story in [the Guardian](#) about an exhibition of censored images from the 1930s.

... Each of the photographs, printed for the first time ... bears an eerie black spot ... created when the negatives were censored in the 1930s by clipping them with a metal punch. Many of the 175,000 photographs in the Farm Security Association archive became defining images of the Great Depression ... However, thousands more images were censored, judged not to meet the strict criteria the photographers had been given for the type of images sought – a tricky brief to show the scale of the problem the association was trying to tackle, but without obliterating all hope ... The censored and approved images all ended that looked too staged were rejected, as were those showing FSA officials ...

Nothing sinister about this, of course. The number of discarded negatives in any series must usually outweigh those retained I suppose – just another appraisal/disposal process really. What is interesting is when the discards survive and unexpectedly become useful or interesting later on. Such cases are a disturbing and educative lesson in how problematic the appraisal process is. In this case, information about the discards also better contextualises the surviving records – e.g. not spontaneous, working to a brief.

2018, July 11: Archivist on €50,000 salary doesn't work for 10 years...

Archivist on €50,000 salary fails to do a day's work for ten years...

Spanish civil servant who had €50,000 salary but failed to do a day's work for ten years banned from post



Every weekday morning, Carles Recio, an archives director in Valencia's provincial government, [would turn up at his office only to clock in and head straight out again](#), before coming back at 4pm to clock out ...

Mr Recio has repeatedly claimed that he was not to blame for his absence, for which he has offered varying explanations. When the criminal case against him was dropped in March, he said that he had in fact been “working like a slave” away from his desk ... “I do documentation work out of the office, the work of a slave” ...

<<**David Povey: An archivist hero. When I went to the Library and Archives stream information session at UNSW in 1989, Peter Orlovich saw me talking to the librarian stream people, and asked me if I enjoyed reading the newspaper. I responded positively and he then urged me to consider archiving as a profession, where I would have sufficient leisure to peruse the papers to my heart's content. It was a variation of the old “join the navy and see the world” trick. Our Spanish colleague however seems to have struck the jackpot. My reality is more like the second story Chris posted today.>>**

2018, December 12: Vladimir Putin, recordkeeper?

From [SBS News](#)



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Russian President Vladimir Putin's then identity card issued by East Germany's Stasi secret police in 1986 has been found in German archives. The card was issued in 1986 when Putin was a mid-ranking KGB spy stationed in Dresden ... It has lain in archives since at least 1990, when the two Germanys were reunified. Found in archives by US historian Douglas Selva, the card was trumpeted by the Bild newspaper as evidence that Russia's now long-serving president was also working for the hated East German security service, wound up in 1990 ... the authority in charge of the Stasi archives said it was common for KGB agents stationed in the fraternal socialist German Democratic Republic to be issued passes giving them entry to Stasi offices ... When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Putin, who held the rank of major, said he brandished a pistol to stop an angry crowd from ransacking his intelligence agency's offices in Dresden and purloining its files, a tactic that worked ...

2019, March 13: We need a pay rise

Recent [article](#) by Kate McClymont on the release of jailed Union Boss Michael Williamson:



... Michael Williamson has been released from jail and is living with his ex-wife in a waterfront house bought and renovated using stolen union funds. His former wife Julieanne received the house in the divorce settlement she struck with her husband before he went to jail. ... In October 2013 Williamson agreed to plead guilty ... As part of his plea deal he signed an undertaking to repay the HSU \$5 million ... But that very same day Williamson declared himself bankrupt. Because Mrs Williamson had already filed for divorce, her share of the couple's assets were protected from her husband's bankruptcy trustee. Apart from some of his defined benefit super scheme, all that was left in the coffers was a dinghy ... Many of Williamson's criminal charges related to his desperate attempts to thwart the police investigation. During a police raid on the union's headquarters, Williamson was caught with a suitcase full of documents which he had asked his son Chris to smuggle out. Inside the suitcase were forged invoices which he had planned to use to cover his tracks. Both the police and the union's investigator, barrister Ian Temby QC, were interested in \$340,000 which had been paid to a company Canme, an acronym formed from the names of the Williamson's five children, which was run by Mrs Williamson. Williamson lied when he claimed his wife had been paid to do the union's archiving. Mrs Williamson declined to be interviewed by Mr Temby about her supposed "archiving". Instead, she wrote an angry letter to him saying she should have been paid more. "I felt I should have been charging \$200 per hour, as the work was downright disgustingly filthy." ...

As practitioners of this "downright disgustingly filthy" work, perhaps we should ask our employers to pay us more.

2019, April 23: Glorification vs Understanding

Some thoughts for ANZAC Week.

The Monash Centre in France proclaims itself to be "a new resource for those travelling to the Australian Remembrance Trail along the Western Front". The website says it is a "cutting-edge multimedia centre [revealing] the Australian Western Front experience through a series of interactive media installations and immersive experiences ... designed so visitors gain a better understanding of the journey of ordinary Australians – told in their



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own voices through letters, diaries and life-size images.” Does travelling the Remembrance Trail, Kokoda, or Gallipoli honour the fallen or obscure their experience in a fog of misunderstanding?

How do we understand the past? It's another dimension to *originality* really. Does the curator merely display or quote from letters, diaries, etc. or jazz them up with life-size images, immersive experiences, and other aids to interpretation? Isn't it part of the curator's job to add the contextual meaning that enhances understanding? It's all part of dealing with memory (including r/keeping as an act of memory). How do we interpret evidence – be it a business transaction or an historical event? What is the difference between fact, interpretation, and spin? How should we regard solemn and/or popular endeavours to celebrate or glorify the past? Should we play the part of kill-joys and deflate such efforts with sober truths (however derived)? Should we stand silently by if people are enjoying themselves and indulge what we know to be historical fictions? How did Catherine the Great really die? What is the truth behind the legend of Bob Hawke and the reflecting pool? Can truth and legend co-exist? Is fake history benign or dangerous? Should taxpayers' money be spent on erudition, display, or theme parks? How do we balance present enjoyment against long-term preservation, entertainment against scholarship? An [opinion piece](#) in the *Guardian* attacking the AWM expansion raises these and other issues:

Australia has not witnessed a more profligate cultural expense proceed with such a shamefully reckless absence of political scrutiny as the proposed half billion dollar expansion of the Australian War Memorial ... both sides of federal politics ... have been cowed into supporting this needless \$498 million project for fear of being seen to disrespect that most overblown shibboleth of Australian national identity, Anzac ... They have been sucker-punched into falling in behind a proposal that is unnecessary, has arguably been devoid of proper executive evaluation and has drawn the ire of everyone from the nation's most esteemed architects, historians and writers to the memorial's own respected former officials ... Where was the rigorous ... scrutiny of this proposal to spend so much money on an institution that has, because it is Anzac's shrine of worship, been quarantined from so many of the budget imposts that have clipped other national cultural institutions including the national library, archives, museum, gallery and portrait gallery, and the Museum of Australian Democracy?

... Public opposition to the proposal – amid some apparent confusion about what, precise, demolition works would take place to provide for the expansion – has been growing. In late March a group of [83 prominent Australians signed a public letter opposing the memorial's expansion](#) on the grounds “they cannot be justified, they show the memorial is being given preference over other national institutions, and the money could be better spent” ... [AWM Director, Brendan Nelson, labels the 83 signatories] “[intellectuals, academics, public servants and a bunch of fellow travellers](#)” ...



[Monash Centre, France](#)



[War Memorial, Canberra](#)

Is over-blown memorialisation of the Anzac Legend (if that is what it is here and at the Monash Centre) actually devaluing the worth of the heritage they celebrate? What do we



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expect from those two institutions - restraint or indulgence? This article is not altogether coherent and the author's reasoning is difficult to unravel (beware the over-use of adverbs), but we can discern three pertinent questions:

1. Who prioritises spending on cultural programmes?
2. On what basis?
3. By what process?

And that is without complicating matters by asking how the pie is divided between Federal, State, and Local programmes.

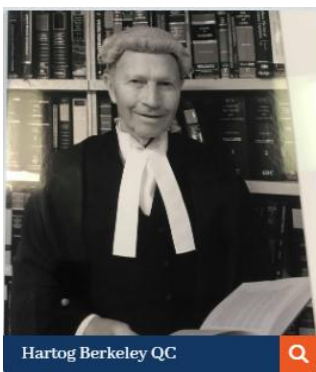
2019, July 17: Distressed recordkeepers

<<From Wendy Duff (14 July, 2019: I am writing to request your participation in a survey of archivists ... conducted by a team of researchers at the University of Toronto ... to collect preliminary data on the experiences of archivists who work with records that elicit emotional responses ...>>

On the Canadian list there is an announcement of the results of research into secondary trauma affecting r/keepers entitled "[Not 'Just My Problem to Handle': Emerging Themes on Secondary Trauma and Archivists](#)." Secondary trauma, which might also be described as vicarious trauma (but isn't), is when you are troubled by the distress of others.

One's first instinct is to ask how on earth can we be so affected. Having myself been monstered by [Hartog Berkeley](#) (then Solicitor-General) back in my Victorian days, I have no trouble believing that we can be traumatized directly. After a brief skim, the article seems to be identifying two kinds of secondary trauma for us: experience of frightful records (Khmer Rouge records are cited and the recent photo of father and child drowned on the banks of the Rio Grande would be another example) and dealings with involved parties traumatized by the subject of records we handle (Stolen Generation and Children in Care, I imagine). Both seem fairly plausible to me. What I didn't find was strong evidence that we are in fact being traumatized in this way (i.e. secondarily) to anything like the extent I imagine other professionals are (health professionals, for example).

PS. I would have said that the trauma we experience when dealing with distressing records is direct, not secondary, but it's probably not worth quibbling about.



PPS. I have been traumatized twice in my life (if you don't count the time I was shot). Once was with [Hartog Berkeley](#) and the other was when I was sent to a [Catholic boarding school](#). After all that, life held no further terrors for me.

2019, August 9: Canadian article that everybody is talking about

There's a lively debate on the Canadian List – the liveliest and longest I've seen there for a long time. It started with attacks on a [forthcoming article](#) on appraisal in *American Archivist*. The article, by Frank J Boles, argues that appraisal should not be based on "social" concerns or aim at remediating bias in the record. The debate has pursued a tortuous path:

- it began with attacks on the content and quality of the piece;



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- coupled with criticism of the peer review process which allowed it through;
- there has been dispute over the scheduling (and subsequent cancellation) of a brown bag session;
- the whole thing has been linked to inclusion of minorities and people of colour within the profession (and society);
- there's been a lot of debate about the debate – ideological or not, de-platforming (“censorship”), power structures within society and the profession, etc. etc.

For my part, I thought the article was OK and I am in sympathy with the author on some of the points he makes. Certainly, the question of the motives of the appraiser is an issue too little discussed. Not having a North American perspective, I had no inkling (until it came up on the List) that objections to his thesis could be linked to racism and privilege. How naïve was I? Arguments about tempering debates (of any kind) to spare the sensitivities of the downtrodden tend to leave me cold; I think you tackle power structures by challenging them openly and directly, not by tempering debate. This includes challenging power structures that attempt to control the terms of a debate (any debate) under the guise of inclusion or on any other ground.

The whole discussion (which is still going on) is fascinating, partly because of the professional issue that launched it (appraisal) but more so because of the fault lines it exposes within the North American profession (which I would guess have parallels elsewhere, at least within the Anglophone areas) around populism, dogma, and the way public discourse is conducted nowadays. Don't know if the Canadian List has an archive but (if so) it would be worth tuning in if you don't subscribe. Luciana has a comment which exposes the existence up North of “closed” lists - something I should have been aware of but wasn't :

I wish [some] readers could access the very thoughtful conversation that is going on the SAA Fellows list, which of course you cannot read because the general Archives and Archivists list was cancelled in the same spirit in which the brown bag lunch was, and now the SAA has multiple lists to which only its members can subscribe and have access to. The open discussion has then moved from the AA list to the Arcan-L list, not because people love Canadians more, but because there are no other outlets for a professional open discussion on any topic and involving people who are not members of one or the other association. I did not think it was right to cancel the AA listserv then and I can see now the segregation of interest groups listservs, where only the fellows, aggregated only by the fact of being fellows, are able to present a large variety of perspectives and interests. This way the profession as a whole lose.

Hear! Hear! Thank God for the Oz-Archivists. Long may it thrive. How strange that the Internet, which was supposed to break down barriers to unfettered exchange of information, has become an instrument for limiting it. A timely reminder that human nature, not technology, shapes our destiny.

2019, August 11:

<<Barbara Reed: ... I'd urge everyone to have a read of the article that Chris has linked to. I, like Chris, have sympathy with some (but not all) of the points raised. It's well worth a read, and it is also worth thinking about the reactions that the article has provoked. The avenues for professional discussion and sometimes dispute are drying up to all our detriment.>>

<<Joanne Evans: ... As it happens on a Sunday afternoon reading Cook's 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community: four shifting archival paradigms' from 2013 published in Archival Science (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10502-012-9180-7>), which makes for an excellent companion/alternate read. Although behind a subscription wall a quick Google reveals that more open access versions are available. In terms of the need for debates and discourses, Cook writes



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'Not only are the paradigms open-ended, overlapping, and constantly evolving, the community of archivists that has emerged through these different and overlapping paradigms is itself bound together as a community by the symbiotic interaction of continuity and disruption, continually constructing and deconstructing our mythologies. This process may lead to an increased capacity in our archival community to harbour plurality, diversity, and difference (both in terms of our own divergent practices, across space, time, and traditions, and in terms of the very different social and cultural communities with which we engage). To return to the opening epigram of this essay, we can view our paradigms and mythologies as bastions of identity, in which case we become defensive and they rigidly destructive, or we can see them as liberating, authorizing us to develop new directions in light of the astonishing challenges to archiving today from theory, technology, and society, and the expectations and demands each occasions. Seeing archival paradigms as changing through time, as each era interprets anew evidence and memory, and thus redefines archival identity and its relationship with social communities, liberates us to embrace new directions yet again for the digital era.' (p. 117-8)

And much more to excite and inspire!>>



<<**Andrew Waugh:** ... Boles completely misses the points being made by the archival movement he is criticizing.

The conclusion that he argues for, that institutions should stick to their mission when undertaking appraisal, is, for me, completely obvious and completely irrelevant to the intellectual movement he is criticising. Clearly, an archival institution is bound by its purpose. A regional archive, for example, should not be accessioning material of another region. But within that purpose there is usually a wide range of choice about what is important to be kept, and what is not. Consider an archive that has, as its mission, to document a region. It could choose to document significant industries, or leading citizens. Or it could choose to document groups that are, otherwise, invisible. The intellectual movement Boles objects to is simply highlighting that, historically, archives have preferred to document particular groups and aspects of society, and ignore others. And that they consider that should change.

If you then think about another focus by Boles, that archives don't have (and never will have) unlimited resources and cannot document everything, I feel his argument grows even weaker and more suspect. Of course archives have limited resources and must prioritise. Fundamentally, that's exactly what appraisal is: it's a formalisation of priorities. But priorities can be changed at any time; there is no reason why the priorities of 50 years ago should be the priorities of today, nor yet tomorrow. Certainly, there is no reason why archival decisions 50 or 100 years ago about priorities should bind modern archives now and into the future. The implication



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of the intellectual movement Boles is criticising is that archives will spend less resources on documenting the great and powerful, and more on the weak and powerless. The implication of Boles' argument is that the priorities of the past (and present) are fine and nothing needs to change. This seems to reflect a position (though Boles' never comes out and says it) that archives are neutral spaces and that archivists are neutral.

If the decisions made by archives are constrained by their institutional mission, then there is a broader question. What types of archival institutions does society set up and fund? This is not a question for individual archivists, but it is certainly one to be raised by the archival profession. It's also notably not canvased in Boles' paper, although I believe that Boles has had a senior role in the US archival profession.

Finally, one aspect of Boles' paper troubles me severely and makes me wonder about his underlying purpose and position. He chose, as his major example of moral relativism, slavery in the US; arguing that once slavery in the US was considered acceptable, and then morally debatable. Whether this is true or not is historically arguable. What is not arguable is that in this time in the US the historical position of slavery, and the subsequent treatment of people of colour after slavery was abolished, is extraordinarily contested and bitter. There is no obvious reason for Boles' to have chosen this example, or to make the argument in the way he did. His paper is not about slavery, nor even about archives documenting slavery. But to make that argument today, and in a US context, is to guarantee an emotional response. It suggests to me that Boles has an extraordinary tin ear, or is being deliberately provocative.>>

Maybe I'm more concerned about some of those "points" than I am enthusiastic (or uncritical) about the arguments Boles employs against them. But looking at the wood rather than the trees, the way I read it, he is arguing against the idea that we have a professional obligation to shape an archival record that is "universal" (based on shared notions of social obligation and morality) and positing instead that a better result would be achieved through local autonomy and diversity. What appeals to me in this idea is this: because appraisal standards change over time (as everyone seems to acknowledge) the imposition of a single, homogeneous, "universal" view, which we know will itself become out-dated as all such views must, may distort the record rather than clean it up. Which appraisal method produces a better result in the long term: universality or diversity? It harks back (almost) to Jenkinson's view that records formation should be natural - allowed to take its course w/o interference by archivists. Of course, Jenkinson's view is unsustainable but the question is whether a heavily purposive dogma, universally applied, should govern proactive appraisal.

The good news, I think, is that archivists are too unorganised, disorderly, and muddled to get their act together in any focussed or sinisterly systematised way. There may be a lot of chatter in the professional literature about documentation but my feeling is that practitioners just aren't collaborative enough (or maybe they just don't have the time) to develop and apply a refined, shared notion of what we should select and preserve. There's been chatter here (I believe) about developing a national documentation strategy. Perhaps we'll see if that develops in any promising direction. My own view is that such debates are pointless until we have a shared (non-purposive) framework within which to have them. I have suggested the barebones outline for such a framework but no one has taken me up on it.

The issues raised by Boles fly off in all directions. One leads back to the (discredited) notion of objectivity (which is not the same as impartiality). How are we to understand the records we deal with? How do we free ourselves of dogma (Acton again)? It can be in something as (seemingly) simple as the language we use. I once had a brawl with Sue McKemmish and Marg Burns over their wish to use the word "patriarchal" in the PROV finding aids. It was interesting that I wasn't bothered by the idea that they were wanting to introduce into our account of the Executive VRG but only the word they wanted to employ in order to do so. Maybe that tells us something about light and heat. At that time I thought we should try to



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find language that was as value-free as possible or at least not anachronistic. Of course, no language is value-free but there are degrees to which language and ideas can be finessed in order to obviate the “emotional response”. I have moved away a bit from that view now and towards a more literary and imaginative approach but that is still basically where I stand. For anyone interested, I can’t recall how the argument ended but with those two I seldom prevailed.

2019, August 12:

<<**Mike Jones:** ... Boles' implication that archives are (or should be) neutral spaces is both regressive and impossible.

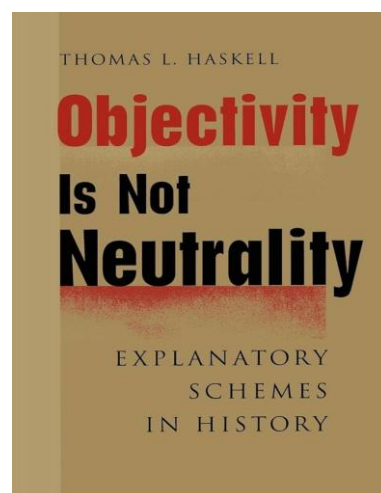
As Eira Tansey has [pointed out](#) the article also employs the term 'social justice' liberally, without providing a definition or significant references. In line with the provocative slavery example, and the comparison between dangerous young black men and the critical thinking abilities of white men (a petulant cry of "not all white men" which shows how it is often, in fact, those in positions of privilege who often feel sensitive to the sting of being challenged or questioned) I would suggest the term is being employed in a pejorative sense in line with the term [Social Justice Warrior](#). It is in part because of the lack of rigour and the reliance on tropes and cliches such as these rather than analysis and reasoned argument that the concerns around the quality of the peer review process for this article are, I believe, entirely justified.

And yes, articles like this spark a lot of debate. But the suggestion that the cancelling of a brown-bag to discuss the article or calling for it not to be published is "tempering debates (of any kind) to spare the sensitivities of the downtrodden" is, in my view, overly dismissive of the functioning of power and privilege in such scenarios, and shifts the blame for stifling debate to the so-called "downtrodden" without taking any responsibility for other things which can temper (or even completely shut down) spaces in which other voices and perspectives can be welcomed, heard, and considered.

As for the idea that denying or retracting the offer of a platform to particular views is somehow stifling intellectual debate, this starts to veer toward claims found in certain media outlets about supposed threats to free speech. On that, I would refer people to this, from the [web comic](#) xkcd (which comes with a coarse language warning)>>

- **Objectivity:** freedom from bias
- **Neutrality:** not engaged on either side

There's a difference.



<<**Mike Jones:** I understand the difference. Just as it is not possible to be free from bias (no matter how elf-aware one might be), similarly there is no space we can occupy



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which is somehow free from engagement with the "sides". Our position is always entangled.>>

It certainly isn't possible if we don't even try. But objectivity and bias are not binary. To paraphrase Evelyn Waugh: *You've no idea how much more biased I'd be if I were not being objective.*

<<**Mike Jones:** I certainly agree with taking a non-binary perspective. However, I do not agree with the suggestion that these are ideals for which we should be striving - and not because they are unattainable ... "trying" in this context comes through universalising a particular perspective, concealing (or denying) its tendentiousness to such an extent that it stops looking like a side and starts to look like not taking sides. One of the tactics for doing so is "othering" - pushing other perspectives to the periphery in the interests of clearing a space it only looks less like a side to those who occupy that position. Those on the periphery can see it for what it is - just another side ,.. Groups who have been marginalised through this process have started to point this out, vocally and increasingly insistently ... I think Boles is trying to clear out that space again - to push other "sides" back out to the periphery ... But, in a non-binary world, there are plenty of sides to choose from.>>

If I'm accused of taking a binary position on Truth vs Dogma, I plead guilty to that. Knowing what is True, in my view, requires a devotion to objectivity tho' the two of us honestly and objectively seeking the Truth, may well reach different conclusions but that is very different from abandoning the effort (for whatever reason). So, I happily plead guilty to "othering" also - othering those who are slaves to Dogma. And surely you agree with me about that when you decry "universalising a particular perspective". We seem to be at one there and, in my simplicity, I rather thought that was one of the points Boles was making also. But somehow we find ourselves at odds. Why? Perhaps, as William Blake put it

***"The Vision of Christ that thou dost see Is my Vision's Greatest Enemy...
Both read the Bible day & night, But thou readst black where I read white."***

Rather than retread a well-worn path, let me just repeat what I said in February (The moving finger writes ...)

Increasingly, however, historical discourse is being drawn into the world of post-truth populism. You are correct, therefore, in detecting a whiff of suspicion (on my part) that the motives expressed (on their part) may be compromised by ideology. But that wouldn't lead me to argue that ADB shouldn't be touched. I certainly reject the postmodern view that a proper scepticism about our ability to think and write objectively is a licence to dispense altogether with the aim of trying to be objective. If that makes me a history warrior, so be it. In this case, I prefer to believe, lacking evidence to the contrary, that ADB will preserve the high standards of scholarship that are its legacy. If I'm going to sit on the fence on an issue like this, I may as well be sanctimonious about it. We laugh at Acton now for aspiring to produce a compendium history in which the reader could not tell where one pen left off and another began, forgetting that his noble aspiration did not imply an uncritical assumption that it could be easily done. I don't think he meant that history should be bland and even-handed, that the historian should abstain from taking a view but rather that we should strive not to be enslaved by prejudice and ideology – to be enslaved (as Ranke might have it) by evidence rather than belief. I share your contempt for those who believe history is just a stringing together of facts and I believe Acton would have also because he believed that history means "judging men and things". But he may have been wiser than we allow when he wrote:

- A Historian has to fight against temptations special to his mode of life, temptations from Country, Class, Church, College, Party, Authority of talents, solicitation of friends.
- The most respectable of these influences are the most dangerous.
- The historian who neglects to root them out is exactly like a juror who votes according to his personal likes or dislikes.



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- In judging men and things Ethics go before Dogma, Politics or Nationality. The Ethics of History cannot be denominational.

So, at any rate, I believe and I will not be shamed out of that ethical position by those who ridicule my failure or that of anyone else to fully live up to it. A proper scholarly disposition ("Ethics go before Dogma ...") cannot be based on human frailty (that's what forgiveness is for). We go on striving even if we fail; we don't build a philosophical position on a foundation of failure. When Evelyn Waugh was criticised for adopting Christianity and still being a nasty so-and-so with it his reply was: "but you've no idea how much worse I'd be if I were not a Christian."

2019, August 13:

<<Andrew Waugh: ... like everyone, when I read a text I read it through the lens of my own experience and perception. That wasn't the message I got from the paper, and if that was the intended message, he certainly didn't make that clear ... Boles presents no evidence that his approach of 'local autonomy and diversity' would result in a more diverse archive record ... local autonomy and diversity is what we have now and it hasn't resulted in a diverse set of records ... Where are the resources to come from to create new archives dedicated to these diverse views? ... they would be located precariously on the margins of the archival space, and would just give the established, mainstream, archives a license to continue to not include the records of particular groups in society. Sounds to me like this is just reinforcing the exclusion from mainstream society. If he meant that it should be up to individual archives to decide what they include, why should we expect this to generate diversity? ... The archives themselves have a long embedded culture which is self reinforcing. Both sets of characteristics suggest that individual archives will make the same type of decisions about appraisal, with minor variations.>>

<<Michael Piggott: The strangest thing to me about the Boles pre-print is the almost complete discounting of the efforts of community archives ... the failure to reference the large literature on community archives produced by Andrew Flinn, Jeannette Bastian, Anne Gilliland, Michelle Caswell and many others ... is odd. Aren't communities documenting their struggles and diverse experiences additional to and despite professional archivists' efforts? To subvert Boles paraphrasing Verne Harris (p 6), there are activist citizen and community archivists including 'smartphone activists' pursuing any and every political agenda, and we should be thankful and supportive. Hong Kong for example.>>

<<he certainly didn't make that clear>>

Agree with that.

<<local autonomy and diversity is what we have now
and it hasn't resulted in a diverse set of records>>

I don't know what Boles means by diversity but I meant non-uniform rather than diversity in the cultural sense.

<<Where are the resources to come from to create
new archives dedicated to these diverse views?>>

Not an issue if "diversity" means non-uniform. It would be how existing archival programmes appraise not just the new ones. I wouldn't want non-uniform (the part of the Boles thesis I detect and you don't) to imply that we should not expand our appraisal criteria to include marginalised and, yes, downtrodden and hitherto excluded sections of society and to the extent Boles is arguing against that I disagree with him as strongly as everybody else.

<<they would be located precariously on the margins of the archival
space, and would just give the established, mainstream, archives a license
to continue to not include the records of particular groups in society. Sounds
to me like this is just reinforcing the exclusion from mainstream society>>

I don't subscribe to that. The problem is how do we broaden the archive to incorporate the excluded?



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<<If he meant that it should be up to individual archives to decide what they include, why should we expect this to generate diversity? ... The archives themselves have a long embedded culture which is self reinforcing. Both sets of characteristics suggest that individual archives will make the same type of decisions about appraisal, with minor variations.>>

Quite so. But aren't we talking about two different things? You can only appraise what is before you and archives working within the mainstream will have before them records reflecting the mainstream. We can adjust our criteria to produce a more socially diverse result in the preserved records that survive under our hand. I have no problem with that but it doesn't address the issue whether or not these adjusted criteria should be applied universally. But I have always supposed that advocates for a more socially diverse archival record were arguing something quite different - viz. that we should look more broadly to find different sources and new ways to add to the totality of the archival record materials that would not in the normal way be incorporated.

On that view, there might be an adjustment to appraisal criteria (universal or not) but the biggest adjustment would be in where we find alternative materials and how we deal with them. Michael has given us the example of community archives (and there were some splendid examples on show in Glasgow - see my earlier report) and the social activists (if I may call them that) who now appear regularly at our conferences have been offering for years new ideas and exciting examples of how to do it.

2019, August 14:

In response to Luciana's earlier remarks on the closure of the American lists, this has now appeared on ARCAN_L:

Actually an outlet was created shortly after SAA killed the A&A listserv. it is a google group called Archivists & Archives. It has 477 members. sadly very little discussion takes place on it. It is an independent group much like the original A&A listserv was before being taken over by SAA. it is open to anyone interested in archives and archivists. membership in a professional association is not necessary. Here is [the link](#)

Yay!

2019, November 9: [Parragirls](#)

<<[Michael Piggott](#):

"Many moments in the book drive home the importance of this work. There are the moving firsthand accounts of the Parragirls themselves, who now have voice and visibility after years of silencing and denial. As they work towards reclaiming their identity, narrative, record and life, the Parragirls show remarkable leadership. In the chapter "Righting the Record", they embark on a printmaking project that sees them trace the marks and words they secretly scratched into the walls and floors of the home so many years ago. They decode these tracings, remaking them, thus challenging the secrecy and judgement of the official welfare record and "[giving] it authentic meaning and purpose"

From a great little [review](#) of Lily Hibberd and Bonney Djuric's edited *Parragirls; Reimagining Parramatta Girls Home through art and memory* ([NewSouth](#)) in today's *The Saturday Paper* by Eugenia [Flynn](#),. Colleagues may recall Bonney Djuric's article "Living Traces – an archive of place: Parramatta Girls Home" in *Archives and Manuscripts*, 44(3), 2016, pp 165-70>>

<< they embark on a printmaking project that sees them trace the marks and words they secretly scratched into the walls and floors of the home so many years ago. They decode these tracings, remaking them, thus challenging the secrecy and judgement of the official welfare record and "[giving] it authentic meaning and purpose" >>

The [associated exhibition](#) at the EPIC Centre in Paddington underlines the point that the artefact can itself be part of the record -



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Although the facilities are heritage-listed, they're subject to the NSW Government's Parramatta North Urban Transformation, which could see parts of the precinct transformed or demolished ... "It was just turning into an absolute derelict site when I was going back," ... I kept thinking that this can't be, and that we'd have to do something. It was like being rendered silent" ... Under the stress of abuse and frequent segregation, many residents turned to self-harm, and some of these stories are recounted in *Parragirls Past, Present*. Some of the girls would scratch marks into their bodies, and would also scratch marks into the walls of the rooms in which they were locked. "The building itself is scarred with our marks, and many of the women's bodies are scarred with the same marks," Djuric says. Although many of those markings have since been painted over, some remain and have even been used as evidence in cases of sexual assault...

2019, December 10: Corporate memory

<<Andrew Wilson: From an article in Inside Story, "Long Knives, short memories" by James Murphy about public service restructures, this on Daniel Andrews' creation of a mega-department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources in 2015:

"Units and authorities were split up or abolished, fragmenting or even losing expertise, documentation and institutional memory. Ask a department to turn over records from their previous incarnation and they will tell you they don't know where they are, how the filing system worked or who they could possibly ask about it. As Laura Tingle pointed out in her Quarterly Essay, *Political Amnesia*, endless turnover — of senior bureaucrats and in departmental structures — shatters the capacity of the public service to remember, and thus to learn."

Whither recordkeeping?>>

<<Michael Piggott: ... The sad reality is that much (not all) of this churn is our old friend administrative change isn't it? And don't government records organisations anticipate these restructures and departmental secretary sackings and have systems and processes ready to document them and manage the records involved? Surely it would be a core function??? And don't they have staff who have cultivated contacts in ministers' offices so that their records too are on the radar when change occurs - as they must know it will and will again?>>



Musical Chairs

Short term memory loss is just as much a problem in the private sector and I think it goes beyond the "administrative change" of yore. It has to do with changed attitudes to corporate behaviour and responsibility - both public and private. I struggle to put it into words but it involves a loss of corporate concern for continuity. It has to do with churn and rapid staff turnover. Also the crumbling of career paths shaped by corporate structures and greater focus on personal development.

Changes in the nature of work driven, in part, by technological effects on the way work is done. Customary r/keeping in the paper world was a standard business practice but, as we know, computerisation and the decline of middle management, whose task r/keeping was, changed all that.

Processes and skill requirements are changing more rapidly. And, yes, the focus on service-delivery accompanied by a devaluation of expertise. Someone needs to research all this. Perhaps someone has?

In my observation administrative change used not to have such deleterious effects.



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In archives where I have worked, long runs of archival materials that have survived successive transitions give evidence of it. Records adhered to a continuity of function. What changed was not so much the exercise of the function but the envelope in which it was carried forward. As I once remarked, agencies are episodes in the life of a function. But now changing what is done and how it is done have become the focus of management attention.

Whether this is good practice or merely a fetish is arguable.

<<Michael Piggott: I agree Chris, which is why I wrote "much (not all) of this churn..." etc. Yet regardless of whether it's 20th C admin. change or 21st C admin. change, whether it's the private sector or the public sector or an increasingly privatized public sector, public records organisations should document what's happening in their jurisdictions and try to manage the records implications. But further to Chris' points as I understand them, indeed the new influences today which shape the record are numerous, complicated and often insidious in the effects. They include use of AI/ algorithms and the shifting of responsibility and cost to the citizen client. Still, the importance of corporate memory and knowing what to learn from it and what is now irrelevant has never been more important, though willfully ignored by many introducing change. In this regard, Volume One Part I chapter 2 of the Interim Report of the Aged Care Royal Commission is worth a look. It began:

"The aged care system has been reviewed repeatedly, with more than 35 major public reviews over the past 40 years. Many more internal reviews, studies and consultancies into aspects of the aged care system have also been commissioned by the Australian Department of Health. Despite these frequent examinations, instances of substandard care recur at distressingly frequent intervals. "

Finally, re "Someone needs to research all this. Perhaps someone has?" Definitely. Yes. Though long gone are the days when a group of government archivists would write a 5-part article on archives and administrative change. >>

2020, January 19: "We made a mistake" The National Archives said ...

<<Michael Piggott: Washington (CNN)The National Archives on Saturday apologized and said it removed from display a 2017 photograph of the Women's March it had altered to censor signs referencing women's anatomy and President Donald Trump's name. "We made a mistake," the National Archives said on Twitter, acknowledging that it had obscured some words from protest signs seen in the image. The Archives said it will replace it with an unaltered image "as soon as possible."...>>

The article on NA(US) continues beyond the facts as set out in Michael's quote and deals with the question of why the images were doctored

... the National Archives said the decision "as a non-partisan, non-political federal agency" to blur Trump's name was to avoid engaging in "current political controversy." The National Archives told the newspaper it obscured the references to women's genitals because the museum gets a lot of young visitors and the words could be seen as inappropriate ... the National Archives does not alter "images or documents that are displayed as artifacts in exhibitions." National Archive officials did not respond to [a] request for any examples of previous times when the museum edited photos or documents to avoid political controversy.

On Twitter, before the National Archives' apology, former national security adviser Susan Rice called the alteration "disturbing." "The National Archives is now whitewashing history ..." Rudy Mehrbani, senior counsel at the Brennan Center for Justice, also tweeted earlier Saturday that the National Archives "created political controversy in attempting to avoid it." "By erasing women's voices, you insult the suffrage movement & minimize the response to Trump's actions & election," Mehrbani, also a veteran of the Obama White House, said.

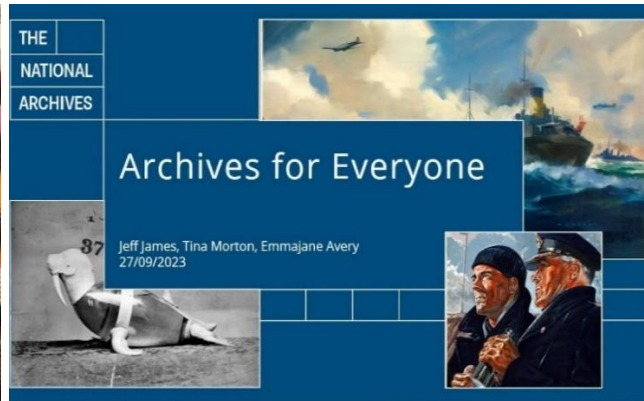
One wonders if the controversy is about tampering with the integrity of the images or the fact that what was removed expressed sentiments congenial to the critics. The alteration



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(any alteration) is indefensible, but what if the sign said: “God hates fags!” This harks back to earlier discussion on this List about the handling of toxic assets.

<<**Michael Piggott: Project Alpha** is about The National Archives envisaging what we would create if we were to start completely anew with our website, as part of our new strategy, *Archives for Everyone*. We have some big, interesting, challenges. With 34 million descriptions of records, our online catalogue is vast and it is easy for people to feel lost. Not everyone who might benefit from the archive has a well-formed research question or knows how to use our services. The experience can feel intimidating and confusing.>>



The handling and description of records unavoidably involves a degree of interpretation and mediation. The old books warn us against it so far as possible, but online access changes all that. First, our audience is now vastly different and their expectations are not (for the most part) those of the scholar. Second, online searching involves opportunities for proactive interrogation of descriptive data (along with digital content) to which we have been too slow to adapt.

NA(UK) is right to identify the problem and to set about doing something but I got nothing from their puff piece about what, in concrete terms, they want to achieve. Too early, you say. Well, yes and no. It sounds like they’ll be employing skills developed in other fields while accepting that our stuff is different. So far so good. At the beginning of their journey, you can’t know (at one level) where it will lead. But strategically where it leads will depend upon the guiding principles which are not technical at all – impartiality, authenticity, reliability, contextuality, structure, and so on. Principles we have valued up to now and should go on valuing. Principles nicely illustrated in the piece about NA(US) and matters about which we need to have clear views as we develop our methodologies in uncharted waters.

2020, January 23:

<<**Joanna Sassoon: And here is the apology from the Director of National Archives where they accept responsibility for what happened.**>>

2020, June 16: What a difference a cash splash makes

On a matter not wholly unrelated to the thread on curatorial integrity, there is news of more opposition to increased spending on AWM and ideas about that institution’s purpose and meaning. Another instance of “purists” speaking out perhaps?

Two former heads of the Australian War Memorial, former ambassadors and several ex-departmental secretaries have called for a reversal of the institution’s “grandiose” \$500m expansion plan, saying the money should be redirected to support veterans ... The AWM has attracted significant controversy over its expansion plans, which it says are necessary to better tell the story of modern conflict, display more of its collection, house “planes, helicopters and armoured vehicles” inside galleries, and relieve circulation pressures caused by high visitor numbers ... The submission is signed by former AWM directors Brendon Kelson and Steve Gower, and other ex-AWM staff, including a former manager of collections,



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Richard Llewellyn, former deputy director Michael McKernan and former senior curator Michael Piggott ...

A spokesman for the AWM said the project would not come at the cost of funding for veterans' welfare. "This is not a case of one or the other, but a commitment to both," he said ...

In a separate submission, Gower described the planned demolition of Anzac Hall as "vandalism" and said the plans did not accord with the vision of Charles Bean, who wanted the memorial to be "not colossal in scale". "It is giantism that could well swamp and destroy the inherent well-recognised heritage value of the site if executed as currently proposed," he said. The submission was made to parliament's standing committee on public works, which is inquiring into the expansion.

Interesting that they want the money directed towards veterans' welfare rather than alternative ways of supporting AWM's "heritage values". Also interesting is the fact that this campaign seems to be coming from within our ranks (if I may describe the objectors as such) rather than from the public. It's open to the criticism that purists (elitists) are deciding what's good for the public and wanting to deprive them of some harmless taxpayer-funded entertainment, isn't it? What price communicating our message?

2020, July 29:

Nobody here but us public servants

The Australian War Memorial warned volunteers they would lose their jobs if they speak publicly or "like" social media comments about its controversial \$500m expansion project. The memorial has [faced much public scrutiny](#) over its costly redevelopment plans, which include demolishing and rebuilding the award-winning Anzac Hall and creating a glass area to house large objects such as an F/A18 Hornet, reconnaissance aircraft, and armoured vehicles. Critics, including former memorial directors, say the redevelopment is excessive, unnecessary and "totally inappropriate".

Earlier this month, an email from a memorial staff member was sent to a distribution list for family history volunteers, which directed them not to speak publicly about the redevelopment. The email, first [reported by the Canberra Times](#), warned that doing so could cost volunteers their jobs.

Under the subheading "We are all public servants", the memorial warned: "This is a timely reminder that as Memorial volunteers you should not publically [sic] comment on the development. "This includes not providing comment on radio via talk back shows, commenting in the newspaper such as in the Letters to the Editor section, or commenting on a link or discussion on such social media as Facebook or Twitter. "This includes not clicking 'Like' to someone else's comment." ...

We know there are limits on what employees (not just public servants) can say. We see it inhibiting and crippling professional discourse in journals, at conferences, and (dare I say it) on this list. But the institutions apply this far more widely than they need to. They're not usually so draconian when an employee speaks in praise of what they're doing - so the restrictions are applied sparingly to uphold approved opinion, not just negatively to suppress dissent. The piety and unction of the Memorial's appeal to general principles should disarm those tempted to think that this is simply about disarming criticism. During the lockdown, I'm spending more time than usual reading and rereading. Thought policing is an aspect of more than one of the threads currently running on this list and, as I began to doze off last night, my eye fell on the following passage from Crane Brinton's *A Decade of Revolution 1789-1799* (1934) Ch.6 "The Republic of Virtue"-

... For Citizen X is not really free when he commits an unrepugnant act, or thinks an unrepugnant thought. Freedom consists, not in doing what one wants to do, but in doing what is right. The general will of the Republic is right. The Committee of Public Safety knows what the general will is. To obey the Committee, therefore, is to obey one's better self, to be really free. To disobey the Committee is to obey one's worse self, to be a slave. When the Committee interferes with a citizen selfishly following his particular and erring will it is, in



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Rousseau's words, forcing him to be free. When it cuts off the head of a very recalcitrant citizen, it is presumably also freeing him. Had not Bellarmine argued that it was a positive benefit to a heretic to kill him, because the longer he lived the more damnation he acquired?
...

2020, August 16:

A battle for the nation's memory

... In recent years the AWM has been accused of overstepping its charter, which requires it to "remember, interpret and understand" Australian war experiences. It has begun to hold exhibitions about current conflicts. It has accepted sponsorship from weapons maker BAE Systems. Most controversially of all, it is now the subject of a bitter battle over a \$500 million redevelopment plan that Brendon Kelson (a director of the Memorial in the 1990s who is not to be confused with Brendan Nelson) has described as an "act of architectural vandalism".

All this raises significant questions about how the Memorial should contribute to our understanding of conflict. How do you fund public institutions in the midst of a recession? How do you recognise multi-faceted modern conflict, including peacekeeping, that escapes the historical definition of war? And is our most famous museum a shrine to sacrifice or a tourist attraction that glorifies war?

On one side is the AWM's powerful chairman, media and mining baron Kerry Stokes, and former AWM director Brendan Nelson ... On the other stand historians and some veterans, as other Canberra institutions face budget pressures with scarce resources available. Admiral Chris Barrie, a former chief of the Australian Defence Force, has heard from many veterans who find they are dragged down rather than uplifted by big memorials and commemorations. "[The government] builds more edifices like the Monash Centre on the Western Front and this sort of thing – that's not helping them, that's not helping their families, it's not helping to repair the damage we've done," Barrie says ...

AWM director Matt Anderson says the development is vital to keep the Memorial relevant and tell the stories of those who put themselves in harm's way for Australia. He argues updating and improving the museum areas deepens the commemorative experience
...

War historian Joan Beaumont has concerns about the opaque way the \$500 million was allocated, especially when other institutions like the National Archives, National Gallery and National Library are cutting staff, collections and services. The National Gallery has recently called for redundancies from its 300 staff, with one in 10 jobs to go. The Library has stopped collecting material on Japan, Korea and mainland South-east Asia and is also likely to shed jobs in a major restructure ... "There's an ongoing debate here as to whether we should be remembering other narratives of Australian history and why we commemorate war as central to our national identity and culture," she says ...

Members of the Heritage Guardians group campaigning against the development told the parliamentary committee in a July hearing they believed the expansion would in part serve as a personal legacy for Nelson. Former AWM principal historian Professor Peter Stanley decried it to the committee as "a slapdash and, frankly, unprofessional proposal". Critics also raise Nelson's role in accepting donations from weapons makers including Lockheed Martin, Thales, BAE Systems, Boeing and Leidos, which some feel is inappropriate for a site commemorating those who died in war. Boeing made Nelson president of its Australian, New Zealand and South Pacific operations in January, after he left the Memorial ...

Hmmmmm, "relevance"? "commemorative experience"? where have I heard that sort of thing before used as a defence of records as a celebration, of the custodian's mission to purposefully shape their meaning for an ideological outcome? When does the archivist become the servant of the State in shaping the national identity? Is "interpret and understand" different from enjoy and identify? Perhaps our internationally accredited and acclaimed expert could give us a clue -



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... 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. [[David Fricker](#) on the merger of State Records NSW with Museums of History]

2020, August 17: Covering up with archives

<<**Joanna Sassoon**: ... I'm interested in knowing if other archives have also been party to creating face-masks bearing their collections, as the State Library of NSW has done.>>

<<**Michael Piggott**: ... First, virtual jigsaws; now face masks as billboards. Clever of the SLNSW, eh? Promote items from the collection (presumably with all the relevant metadata), generate revenue to "lessen the burden on the taxpayer", contribute to public health, etc. Now, thinking of Chris' post earlier today, if only the State Archives were part of Sydney Living Museums ... although, seriously, can anyone outdo the War Memorial for task and ingenuity? In the 1920s it sold German helmets repurposed as pot stands and coal buckets; and today, well, judge for yourself ... >>

2020, August 18:

No one I imagine would want to argue that archives should not have public programmes – that we should shrink demurely out of the limelight. No. Promoting our mission in the public mind and for the attention of the funding authorities is more than a pleasure, it is a duty. It is the only way to survive and prosper. But promoting archives as what? That is the issue. It gets back to the difficulties arising from the dual-purpose nature of the mission we have shaped for ourselves. Let us call them [glamour](#) and [order](#), not forgetting that a devotion to [access](#) can infuse both – as an attack of emotion (glamour) or a means of approach (order).



Order Principle of Management



After a lifetime spent trying (and failing) to do it, I have concluded that the duality is an impossible sell. Either one or the other prevails or (what may be worse) the message becomes confused. We are what we say we are and that, ultimately, is what we become. If people think you're glamorous, they simply won't take you seriously as an instrument of order. If people accept that order is your mission, they will accuse you (as we have recently observed) of neglecting the collection and failing to inspire the citizenry with its rich heritage. And that is taking an optimistic view that the forces involved in shaping (or misshaping) our future will even understand the true nature of the alternatives. The failure does not lie in our inability to craft a dual message but in the unlikelihood that the public and obtuse politicians will respond to it in an enduring or nurturing way.



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Michael's examples of the triviality to which glamour can descend remind me of the attempt, when I was Keeper there, to subsume PROV within "Archival Heritage". The same thing was tried when I was in NZ. *"To lose one archives to heritage, Mr Hurley, may be regarded as a misfortune,"* John Cross quipped, *"but to lose two looks like carelessness."* In Melbourne in those days, trams were decorated out periodically with themes (maybe they still are) and an archives-themed tram was amongst the initiatives proposed by the team of no-hopers brought in to advance this nonsense. I was able to strike a small blow for order when showing my hapless successor as Keeper some of our treasures and she asked me diffidently if it was permitted to touch them. I was rewarded with the look of terror that leapt into her eye when I replied, *"the Keeper can do anything."*

I really must stop all this senile reminiscence. It must be boring the pants off people.

<<**Michael Piggott: Interesting framework, and prompts the question to what degree is the jurisdictional context relevant to the tensions within the dual purpose mission. In the public sector, there are numerous publics/audiences and Chris' obtuse politicians in play. But in other contexts? Take higher education bodies (e.g. the University of Melbourne - a body established by statute and subject to relevant laws and technically the PROV - has a separate Records Services program, a collecting archives which also has custody of the university's historical archives, and a GLAM "cultural collections" program)? Glamour, order and a primary intent for access (academic research). Or Westpac Bank, where there is a separate corporate archives within historical services? Glamour and a different primary intent for access (research for business needs). And for both, their separate glamour agendas are probably different from those expected of public records offices too.**

2020, August 19:

<<**Peter Crush: ... A clearly identified (preferably distinctive) Archive building (or space within another) in a prominent place enjoying large numbers of passing pedestrian traffic enters the common psyche where it can be compared as a separate entity with the Library, the Museum, the Art Gallery. These separate entities beg the question, "What are the differences between them?" I suggest few members of the public ask themselves that question...Once the member of the public enters the Archive it is up to the Archivist to dispel any confusion ... Promoting the Archivist's mission becomes increasingly difficult when one or more of the library, museum or art gallery functions is combined with the archival ...>>**

2020, November 22: Commemorating war

Reactions to the Afghanistan War Crimes Report are, of course, diverse. Shock and horror mixed with varying levels of denial ranging from the rotten apple defence (the system is good but a few rogues went off the reservation) to the everyone-does-it defence (yes, we erred but we aren't the only ones, or the worst). There's even a tone of self-congratulation creeping in (aren't we good for owning up to our mistakes).

On Saturday on the [front page of the SMH](#) (also in the Age), ex Defence Force Chief Chris Barrie (linking the Affair to current criticism of AWM governance) wants *"exhibits about the Special Air Service Regiment removed from public display while the Memorial considers its response to a comprehensive inquiry into their conduct."* This raises the question of the right curatorial tone when memorialising war, something I imagine AWM has had to fret over since its inception. How do you commemorate war without glorifying it? This is a problem for us all but especially for AWM which does little else. AWM tells the story of [crimes committed against Australian soldiers](#) but the story of [crimes committed by Australian soldiers](#) is trickier.

It's not new and it's well attested – e.g. [Breaker Morant](#), [Surafend](#), [Bita Paka](#), [Vietnam](#), and many more. If commemorations are to be de-platformed while we consider our response



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when will that be? What will be left to memorialise? Underlying it all is the concept of “war crime” – a very slippery beast. No doubt, there are statutory provisions, policies, handbooks, conventions, etc a-plenty which will be used in this case but at a basic moral level what as a society do we accept as legitimate and what not? And, like all other social mores bearing on curatorship, how do we deal with changing sensibilities over time?

The current commentary is focusing on “unlawful” killing. War is about State-sanctioned killing. What does it matter what the State sanctions? The mediaeval churchman tried to establish “[God’s Truce](#)” and “[Just War](#)” as a way of mitigating the violence knowing they couldn’t eliminate it. That’s why it matters. Those were the theologians, not the Church militant, as witness the Bishop asked how to [distinguish heretics from good Catholics](#) who is said to have screamed “*Kill them all! Kill them all! God will know his own.*”

We cherish the ANZAC Myth – valiant, selfless Australians who should be honoured and celebrated – sneakily proud of their reputation for valour. But how can we suppose that the 39 killings (that we know about) stop there? If we’re going to be honest and face up to Truth, doesn’t AWM and all of us need to “face up” to the fact that alongside bravery and sacrifice terrible things are done by our soldiers (irrespective of what is lawful)? And shouldn’t that be part of the memory too?

2020, November 25:

From [today’s SMH](#)

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has promised the Australian War Memorial council would have “oversight” of any move to acknowledge alleged war crimes by Australia’s special forces, despite its director saying curators and historians would be given free rein. Mr Morrison said the War Memorial’s council has “*a lot of people with a lot of experience*” who would “*exercise appropriate judgment*” on future plans to recognise the Brereton inquiry’s findings ...

... the War Memorial’s director Matt Anderson said the institution was a “*place of truth*”, and its curatorial and historical teams would be given the freedom to “*arrive at the best treatment of the subjects*”. Mr Morrison said there had to be a presumption of innocence for the soldiers accused of war crimes, and pointed out there was not yet any specific proposal from the War Memorial ...

In his interview with his masthead, Mr Anderson said while the council was responsible for all activities and policies of the War Memorial, “*the practice is that they leave the curatorial decisions to the subject matter experts*” ... “*The council has every trust in our curatorial and historical teams and gives them free range to arrive at the best treatment of the subjects.*”

<<**Andrew Waugh: The Chairman (*) of the AWM council is Kerry Stokes. He's funding the libel action bought by one of the soldiers that has been reported to have been involved in war crimes against the media outlets that reported it. He's also stated that a fund that he does not control would be available to fund the defence of any soldiers prosecuted for war crimes. A former director of the AWM, Brendan Kelson, has stated that Stokes' position is consequently untenable. A position rejected by the Prime Minister. (*) According to the AWM website, the official title of the position. Incidentally, spare a thought for the historians currently employed by the Defence Department to write the history of the Afghanistan action. Not only will they have to address the Brereton findings, presumably before any cases go to court, but they will also have to accept that the fundamental operational reports that they rely on have been found to be deliberate lies. Unfortunately, a perfect example of why archivists distinguish between reliability, authenticity, and integrity. These records are authentic, and have retained integrity, but are not reliable.**



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Scott Morrison said [there must be a "presumption of innocence" for Australia's soldiers](#)
[Last week, the Australian Financial Review reported that Mr Stokes had promised](#)
[to help members of the Special Air Service regiment through an](#)
[existing special fund that could, among other things, cover legal costs](#)

Should the nation's memory of this be framed in a court of law? Scott Morrison seems to think so. But isn't the crucial memory already framed by the Brereton Report – four years of painstaking inquiry and research in the making? Are its careful conclusions to be regarded as tentative pending court proceedings or as authoritative – not as to the accused's guilt or innocence but as to what happened? Not the last word (there's never a last word) but a weighty and substantial assessment that can't be dismissed.

Why are we not hearing from the deniers and the triumphalists much that indicates [empathy for the Afghans](#) who endured the atrocities? Why are we not hearing more from them about the courage of those soldiers who spoke up and tried to stop it? What about asking Mr Stokes to set up a fund to support the whistle-blowers, whose ordeal will undoubtedly be as trying as that of the accused and the dishonoured?

[My Lai](#) was arguably the most notorious and (eventually) the best documented atrocity of the Vietnam War. Only one person ([William Calley](#)) was convicted and he got off lightly. The person who was arguably more to blame was Calley's superior ([Ernest Medina](#)) who did most to instill the veins-in-your-teeth culture that probably sparked the massacre. Even then, some of the perpetrators seemingly just went along with those driven by blood-lust. The ones on the ground (e.g. [Hugh Thompson](#)) who tried to stop the killing, and were called traitors by Congressman [Mendel Rivers](#), came from other units.



It is quite likely that convictions here will be just as [hard to obtain and sustain](#). So, the way the legal process pans out may be largely immaterial in shaping the memory. But, then, very few aspects of the Anzac Legend have been judicially adjudicated. Nor, if it comes to that, have many other historical memories. And those that have (Joan of Arc, Thomas More, Martin Luther, Jan Huss, etc.) seldom belong to the lawyers in the long run anyhow. The development of this memory has already begun. The outcome of any legal process will be part of it but I very much doubt that it will be the last word. It is how we handle the memory from this point on, not how the judicial system deals with it, that counts. And I rather suspect that it will turn out to be another one of those contested memories.

2020, November 27:

[Opinion piece](#) in today's SMH by Frank Bongiorno (**professor and head of the School of History at the Australian National University. He is a former president of [Honest History](#)**).

... there is never any shortage of education experts. Teachers spend years learning to be teachers, but many of us feel fully qualified to tell them how to do their jobs. Museum



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curators suffer similarly ... Yet when Prime Minister Scott Morrison was asked about how the Australian War Memorial should respond to the Brereton report on alleged war crimes in Afghanistan, he reassured us that the War Memorial's council had "oversight" and would work with the director Matt Anderson to ensure an appropriate response.

The council is chaired by Kerry Stokes, a businessman who has undertaken to help SAS members accused of war crimes and is currently bank-rolling a defamation action against Nine (owner of this masthead) by Victoria Cross winner Ben Roberts-Smith ... The council also includes former Liberal prime minister Tony Abbott. Otherwise, its governing body comprises mainly military or ex-military personnel. There is nobody with specialist historical or museum expertise.

This is in itself unfortunate for an institution that claims to combine "*a shrine, a world-class museum, and an extensive archive*", with a mission to lead "*remembrance and understanding of Australia's wartime experience*" ... The current director, Matt Anderson ... has a good understanding of the only way an institution such as the War Memorial can operate professionally and independently. Curatorial decisions about how the War Memorial will respond to the Brereton report, Anderson explains, are to be left to "the subject matter experts" ...

We've been here before. Twenty years ago, the National Museum of Australia was stalked by an energetic campaign of the culture warriors, whom the Howard government ensured had solid representation on its council. As the museum moved towards opening day in its new building, right-wing council members were reviewing and criticising exhibition content. The National Museum was mired for years in unproductive culture wars, becoming a regular topic for "expert" analysis by the commentariat ... every curator ... understands that they are only ever a label away from more controversy

The War Memorial's ... previous director, Dr Brendan Nelson...unwisely entered the controversy over possible war crimes in Afghanistan when criticising the media over its treatment of Roberts-Smith. Nelson dismissed it as an attempt to "*tear down our heroes*"...The War Memorial has also maintained a gallery on the war in Afghanistan, knowing full well that there were troubling matters seeping into the public sphere ...

The Afghanistan war is not the only conflict in which Australians might have committed war crimes. There are incidents in Charles Bean's *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* that disclose breaches of the rules of war ... if [AWM] is to become the "*place of truth*" ... it will need explore the darker side of Australians at war as an urgent matter of honest history and national self-reckoning.

Are we entitled to this kind of trust? What would culture warriors and revisionists (e.g. BLM) think about those comments? We are entitled, I think to have our expertise acknowledged and respected but (as we have seen in another thread) we can't always be trusted. So, we remain open to having our judgements challenged. What is odious about Morrison's comments is the implied dismissal of expert opinion. But, as Bongiorno implies, the question is how can we respond to the challenge - adjusting to the pressure, resisting it, taking sides, fighting back?

2020, December 8:

As predicted, [the push-back](#) is beginning to conflate historical truth and criminal conviction

... The ADF has walked back General Campbell's initial pledge to strip the Meritorious Unit Citation from 3000 special forces troops. However, controversy still lingers over the recommendation from the war crimes report ... "*I find this so unAustralian. You're already saying these guys are guilty, that you're investigating,*" Senator Lambie said ... "*You're saying all 3000 are guilty ... Back it off until we know who is proven guilty.*"

The Tasmanian senator stood alongside Mr Russell, who runs soldiers' support community Voice Of A Veteran ... "*The lowest of the low is that you continue to stand here and accuse them of crimes they're about to stand in an investigation, and must stand in court. No one, including the Prime Minister, is judge and jury,*" Mr Russell said ... "*there's been a four and a half year inquiry that has been conducted, and what we need to do now is ... allow those accused to be afforded the presumption of innocence.*" Mr Russell also



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questioned how the report was compiled. “*There are so many questions [about the Brereton report], such as immunity being provided, people not medically sound being interviewed,*” he said

The Brereton Report is about more than the identification of a few alleged criminals. It is about the conduct of special forces operations in Afghanistan irrespective of whether culprits can be identified and prosecuted. It is an evaluation of the history of those operations but it is already clear that, if no convictions are recorded, some will say the evaluation is flawed – that it never happened.

So, what follows if there are no convictions? Does that mean that no atrocities occurred? Does it mean the historical evaluation reached by Brereton is untrue (or unproven)? Will the historical truth of the Report be negated by a lack of convictions, weakened, or be unaffected? Did Richard III murder his nephews? A [mock trial](#) conducted some years ago failed to convict. That has not stopped many historians (almost all, in fact) and members of the public from concluding that he did or probably did. And the King also has his defenders (myself, I’ve always thought the D. of Buckingham was the most likely culprit) but the only sensible conclusion is we’ll never know. But there are many degrees of historical certainty not dependent on criminal conviction (indeed, if that were the bench-mark, there’d be very little history left). Is the historical truth of the [einsatzgruppen massacres](#) negated by the relatively few prosecutions and convictions? Does it depend on social context – few deniers for Nazi atrocities but the Anzacs are a different kettle of fish.

We can be sure that the Afghanistan Affair has a long way yet to go and that passions will run high. So far as our bailiwick is concerned (and I’m open to correction here) it seems to be based mostly on oral testimony and hearsay rather than documentary evidence. Pity the house of memory then in a post-Truth age that must evaluate the facts and deal with disputation over the meaning of the facts as well as disputation over what the facts are (“*people not medically sound being interviewed*”). The underlying issue (by no means a new one) is how to deal with controversy. Should a house of memory endeavour to be neutral (not take a position so as not to offend anyone, as if that is even possible), impartial (take a fair and independent view, and brave the blow-back), socially responsible (deferring to the dominant view, or the one most likely to shout loudest), or just run like hell?

2020, December 4: “New Museum”

<<[Joanna Sassoon](#): A small [article](#) from the Townsville Daily bulletin ... New WA museum removes reference to COVID-19 ‘originating in China’ after complaint. It seems that scientific rigour has been lost in the immediate haste to include contemporary information in exhibits by venerable scientific institutions museum exhibitions information. >>

2020, December 5:

More on [museum wars](#)

The state museum of [Western Australia](#) has changed a display that stated mainland China was the “origin” of the coronavirus and included Taiwan in a map of China, after a complaint from the WA Chinese consul general. The WA Museum Boola Bardip said the exhibit was changed for “factual” reasons, not political pressure, because the World Health Organization has not yet determined where the virus technically originated. The museum also changed a world map in the exhibit to include Taiwan when [China](#) was selected – claiming that it reflected “Australian government policy”. But Mark Harrison, a senior lecturer in Chinese studies at the University of Tasmania, said this was “not correct” and the museum had overstepped Australia’s own foreign policy on Taiwan. The change came after the museum received a letter of complaint from the WA Chinese consul general, Dong Zhi Hua ...

A spokeswoman for the WA Museum said there was no coercion from the consulate and it was a factual correction ... A museum spokeswoman added: “Whatever people’s



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personal views may be about international politics, as a museum we deal in facts.” ... Researcher Sophie McNeill from Human Rights Watch Australia said the shift “fits a pattern” of political pressure from the Chinese government on museums and other institutions. “We saw this in France, where two months ago Chinese officials tried to change and rewrite elements of an exhibition on Mongolian history and to blacklist certain words,” she told Guardian Australia ...

Let others squabble over how to describe “China” and “Taiwan”. My question is this: what kind of museum/gallery looks to find Truth in “Australian government policy”? Joseph Goebbels could ask no more from a director or curator.

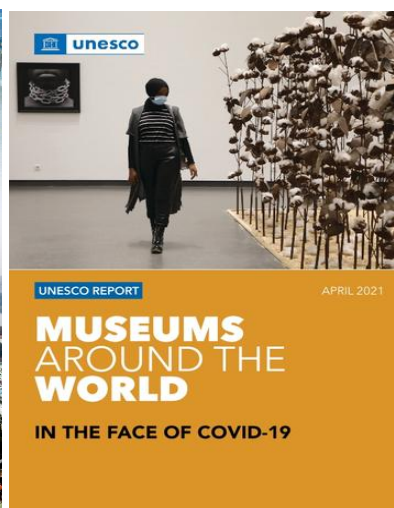
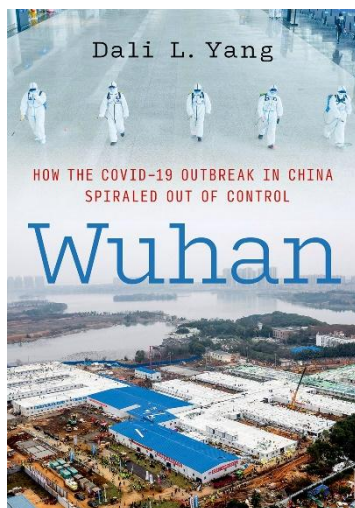
<<Andrew Waugh: To be fair, they weren't looking for truth. They were looking for a plausible excuse.>>

2020, December 6:

Joanna laments the loss of scientific rigour “in the immediate haste to include contemporary information in ... exhibitions ...” The next house of memory contemplating such immediate haste will likely think twice about upsetting China and how indeed to avoid upsetting anyone in a position to raise a powerful voice in opposition. That’s how intimidation moves from punishing unwelcome views that are expressed (shouting them down, megaphone politics, dismissal, hate speech laws) to prior restraint intended to prevent dissent from being expressed in the first place (de-platforming, intimidation, correctness, not offending those who say they’re offended).

For some of our institutions (and I may be over-generous with “some”) not being put to the trouble of “looking for a plausible excuse.” will be their way of engaging with social and political dilemmas. It’s called a [Heckler’s Veto](#)

... restrictions on speech because of the anticipated or actual reactions of opponents ... also used in general conversation to refer to any incident in which opponents block speech by direct action or by “shouting down” a speaker through protest.



As we have seen, hecklers won’t limit themselves to “contemporary information” unless you extend that concept to include any topic from any time that offends people now (e.g. slavery, religion, race, identity, etc.), So, a house of memory must decide how to deal with the Heckler’s Veto as it navigates the entire range of social and political agendas in contemporary life, not just with information about contemporary events. Verily, [the past is prologue](#).

2020, December 7:

<<Michael Piggott: ... aren't the conceptual categories pretty settled? Fact, evidence, meaning, interpretation, etc? One of the best recent articulations of the categories and



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their contemporary importance is Laura Millar's *A Matter of Facts. The Value of Evidence in an Information Age* ... Not unrelated, reviews continue to appear of the two competing "Palace Letters" books, Jenny Hocking's *The Palace Letters* (Scribe, 2020) and Paul Kelly and Troy Bramston's *The Truth of the Palace Letters* (Melbourne University Press, 2020) ... what could be more relevant to our professional concerns than these two books and the legal and NAA dramas which preceded the letters' release? ... A/Prof Paul Strangio's comparative review in last weekend's SMH ... demonstrates how the agreed facts of the letters have given rise to sharply different interpretations ("guilty" party was the Palace *versus* "guilty" parties were Whitlam + Fraser + Kerr). In *The Spectator* of 21 November 2020 David Pearl lumps for just Fraser and Whitlam ("Dismiss dismissal dogma"). Others reckon Prince Charles and Sir David Smith need to be cited too. Oh dear. What to think? So imagine the NAA mounting a major exhibition of the letters and their meaning, stressing the archival aspects seeing it is the national archives. It was and is deeply implicated in the whole saga, as we know and as Strangio and Hocking explain. It would be a fascinating exhibition ... >>

2020, December 9:

On a light-hearted note, I would draw your attention to the "fact" that they have just changed the height of Mt Everest. It's all a bit like one of those irregular verbs Bernard Wooley is so fond of:

- I am impartial
- You are politically incorrect
- He has been charged under the hate speech provisions of the Anti-Discrimination Act

Of course, the mountain hasn't actually changed at all but our understanding of it has (if you accept the recalibration) and if you don't (I suppose) Donald Trump will be President of the USA after Jan.20.- a depressingly post-modernist conclusion that what is true is that which we accept as true.

2021, January 24: Records management theory & digital records

<<Andrew Waugh: A great paper on the handling of email ... Lappin is attempting to build a theory of handling email 'in place'. Reviews the theory of records management (including the Australian series system and its extensions), and links these with Durranti & Bearman's approaches to digital records. I'm about 2/3rds of the way through, randomly going 'Yep' and 'But ...' I'd be interested to hear Chris' take on the theory ...>>

The authors identify three "models" – separation (Duranti), interventionist (Bearman), and in-place.

The in-place model is different in nature to the other two models. Duranti and Bearmans' models were aspirational and sought to achieve a form of perfection in the way records are managed, whereas the in-place model is resigned to the necessity of managing records in applications that are not designed with recordkeeping in mind.

I'm not sure I would go along with how they describe the Duranti & Bearman models (and I suspect Luciana and David might have something to say also). I can well remember a late-night discussion during a Monash residential when David said that the hardest part of his message for archivists to accept was the idea that, having identified the functional requirements for evidence in recordkeeping, you then needed to discard as many of them as you safely could when applying them to particular instances. Hardly an aspiration to perfection.

That said, I have always been drawn to the Bearman side of the argument because of a long-held conviction that EDRMS is a thing of the past and that the future of recordkeeping is the



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integration of r/keeping functionality into business applications. But at a practical level, architects are always going to be looking for storage alternatives for long-lived data, so separation of some kind (preferably physical rather than logical) may need some theoretical basis also – cf. Duranti.

We have, of course, been conspicuously unsuccessful in selling our case (so resignation of some kind is an appropriate posture but not an excuse for giving up). That is why I would like to see us join forces with the DQ (Data Quality) community. Theirs is essentially the same story as ours – selling standards with mixed success. I’m afraid, I can’t find in the in-place “model” anything more sophisticated than an admonition to do the best you can within the limitations you’ve got – and defining what is “best” (i.e. identifying how far short of what is needed your expedients fall) depends on theoretical constructs that identify what is required.

2022, December 19: ... Dignity by Design ...

<<**Joanne Evans:**

**Call for Papers for Archival Science Special Issue - Dignity
by Design : Pathways to Participatory Recordkeeping Systems**

...Dignity is a rich, complex and multifaceted concept that ‘places obligations on each of us to treat others well’ (Michael, 2014).

Rights-based archival and recordkeeping scholarship has established the need to move beyond passive, post-hoc and paternalistic forms of participation, take active steps to re-distribute archival power, and evolve a participatory recordkeeping paradigm. We now have an opportunity to lead the design of recordkeeping and archival systems that embrace love, care, trust, and kindness in concert with transparency and accountability. But how do we make this a reality?

We invite contributions that consider the ways in which dignity in recordkeeping and archival systems can be felt, experienced, and actively realised - what we are calling ‘dignity by design’ ...>>

2022, December 20:

Dignity, as Joanna et al say, is complicated. It is a big part of caring. Those of us who are untrained and have been carers (as I was) know that you must learn new things, not all of them comfortable. Not giving way to impatience is a biggie. Another is [dignity risk](#) (basically, not imposing sanctity or needless [dependency](#) on those we empathise with).

2024, June 24: RIMPA CEO ... on e/recordkeeping (or lack thereof)

APS Faces looming record keeping disaster

... The recent release of the [Data and Digital Government Strategy](#) has been touted by the government as a solution, but unfortunately it falls woefully short. The recent Auditor-General Report No. 44 sheds light on the gravity of the situation, revealing major deficiencies in how records are managed across APS agencies. This issue isn’t new; it’s been highlighted in previous audit reports and even Royal Commissions. The recent [Robodebt Royal Commission](#) findings underscore the consequences of poor recordkeeping ...

The exponential growth in digital data has overwhelmed traditional approaches to record management. While IT solutions have been implemented, they often lack integration with sound information management principles ... despite efforts to reduce physical record holdings, little progress has been made, with storage volumes remaining stagnant ...

The unchecked growth in digital records within APS agencies highlights a pressing need for proactive measures ... The absorption of records management into IT functions has led to a lack of prioritisation and inadequate resourcing ... The inadequacy of the Archives Act 1983 exacerbates these challenges. Enacted in an era dominated by physical records, it fails to address the complexities of the digital age ... RIMPA Global [advocates] for dialogue and collaboration to modernise the Archives Act 1983 and other relevant legislation ...

9 February, 2024



2024, June 25:

<<RIMPA Global [advocates] for dialogue and collaboration to modernise the Archives Act 1983 and other relevant legislation ...>>

If the *Archives Act* (and other relevant legislation) is the answer, what was the question?

Flawed Conceptual Model

Forty years on, has the *Archives Act* 1983 (in the development of which I had a hand, so I can ask this) worked? Why is there even an Act? Is legislation the right vehicle for r/keeping rules and practices. We have such legislation to give the archives authorities heft. To do what? They set standards that are widely ignored. They aren't auditors. They aren't investigators of lapses. They certainly aren't prosecutors of violations. Unlike most legislation, the focus is internal, on the workings of government itself, whereas most legislation is external in focus, on the doings of people and corporations. Governments legislate for internal operations (like audit, financial practices, human resources, accessibility) because legislating is pretty much all they know how to do. Legislation with an internal focus is the government equivalent of rules and procedures promulgated within a private corporation, but much more inflexible and difficult to adjust to changing circumstances.

Central Coast Council staff have claimed that it is "not practical" for them to account for the detail of \$712.8 million of the Council's proposed budget ... in response to a submission by the Peninsula Residents' Association [who] asked for the detail of the operational expenses "to be tabulated in a similar form to the capital works program ... At a fundamental level [the failure to do so] hardly qualifies for the common English meaning of the term Plan ... There is no evidence ... that council staff have changed their ways since the Council's financial crisis and the subsequent public inquiry ... there is simply not the transparency or accessibility to relevant information for effective accountability that would avoid such a crisis arising again" ... The Council staff response stated [inter alia] "similar to other forms of taxation, rates revenue is applied across the local government area based on need and priority". Peninsula News 24 June 2024

Sir Humphrey would be proud. Council staff have forgotten the distinction between planning and flexibility. We have been in administration up here, but democracy is about to return to the Central Coast. Will it make a difference? My friends the ducks and pelicans think not. After near bankruptcy and the horrors of administration some minds are more focused but we will probably see the return of the same old crowd: the virtuous, the mindless, the opportunists, and the political hacks (*sigh*).

R/keeping is an important part of good business practice but not everything. You can't separate good r/recordkeeping from good business practice. It is an integrated model we need (one that may include an *Archives Act* so long as we don't mistake enabling for accomplishment). But the key question is why should the regulation of government business practice be different from regulation of the private sector? Shouldn't we have the same set of external rules and procedures for both the public and the private sector? Shouldn't the archives authorities themselves be subject to those rules and procedures for their performance?

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



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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](#).

Who Guards the Guardians?

What are the respective roles of the authorities, the professional bodies, and the regulators (assuming these are three distinct roles)? What should be the source for good rules and procedures? As part of the r/keeping process within government, my answer now would be that the government archives must be subject to such rules and procedures (not their source). If there is to be an archives authority to regulate internal rules and procedures, then it must be someone else and the archives must itself be subject to such regulation even when it turns itself into a museum (perhaps especially so when it does that). Professional bodies have a role to play (as with doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, accountants, auditors, etc.) but money-making has polluted many of them. Perhaps impoverished r/keepers should look to the nurses for an example. So, this is now the pressing question: where do we look for a source of good r/keeping rules and procedures as part of the mix that supports good business practice (both public and private)? That should be relatively easy. The hard bit is how are they to be enforced?

2024, September 4:



I've become an Owl

Here in Adelaide at the 39th RIMPA Convention where, somewhat to my surprise, I was asked to participate on a Panel of Owls (retired or semi-retired wise souls sharing their life experiences with younger and more active professionals). I was happy to do it – probably as close as I'll ever get to being a living treasure. The records managers have always been kinder to me than the archivists. Perhaps because archivists are the more saintly and records managers are the more pragmatic.

We were asked about a “major change you have seen in the industry over your career”. My answer was “tools” (specifically IT tools). Recordkeeping skills remain fundamentally the same whether the tools used are digital processes or clay tablets and a chisel. If you asked someone in the 19th century about r/keeping they would look at you in wild surmise. R/keeping wasn't something you did, it was how you did business (cf. [Tim Linkinwater](#)) and it was done much the same as always (at least since the advent of double-entry bookkeeping). RM and IM began as different things; IM systems handled digital stuff but RM systems handled information about stuff in other formats. Then, records themselves became digital and we integrated IM and RM into stand-alone systems, with the attendant danger that recordkeeping skills would be replaced by generic IT functionality. IT provided us with a hammer and we were tempted to treat everything as a nail. The challenge for us is how to re-integrate recordkeeping functionality into online business processes so that records are made and kept for as long as they are needed and supported by systems combining business needs and recordkeeping needs. That's the journey we're still on.

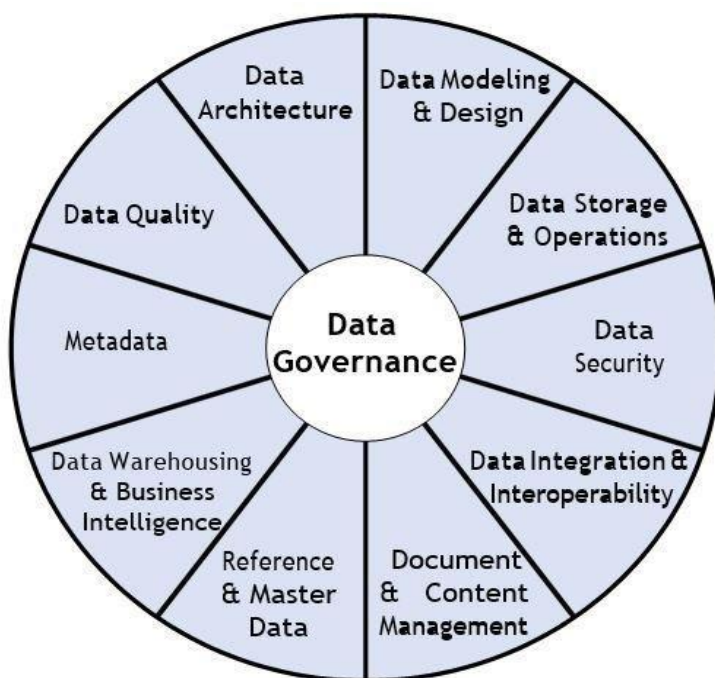
Back in the day, people like [David Bearman](#) and [John McDonald](#) were preaching the need to integrate. Since then, we've adopted make-shift measures: EDRMS, AGRKMS, metadata standards (standards of all sorts), information asset registers, protocols, procedures, etc, etc. All these are good and useful but they are still imperfect means to the end we know (or should know) has to be reached – viz. full integration - because they stand outside the business process. As well as integrating the tools, we must also integrate the knowledge and skills (in addition to our own) needed to deploy them, aligning recordkeeping knowledge and skills with the rest of Information & Knowledge Management. This doesn't mean blending so that the particular focus of recordkeeping is blurred and lost, but it does mean



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we can't go it alone. Data Management struggles to be heard and so do we; we need to be allies. Recordkeeping is not a job description; it is an intellectual construct. An Information Manager might stumble across a record but it will by accident unless the work is informed by r/keeping knowledge.

AI is all the rage here. On Tuesday, I attended the Data Management Workshop. They used the DAMA [Data Governance Diagram](#) (DMBoK), in which (I imagine) they suppose recordkeeping to occupy the *Documents & Content Management* and *Data Quality* quadrants.



I used similar diagrams in [a presentation](#) at a RIMPA Conference twenty years ago with records (“evidence”) in the centre hub. The *Evidence Solution* (our particular concern) then becomes, on this view, part of a suite of knowledge and skills that business uses (or not) to meet its needs. You can add whatever seems appropriate in the spokes of an Evidence Wheel (including Data Management and Data Quality amongst them). Years ago, I attended some Data Quality (DQ) Conferences. I concluded they were just like us and argued for closer ties. An observation made at one of those conferences has stayed with me:

We're interested in the water quality, not just in the plumbing.

Comrade!

IT gave the “user” power to handle data as they pleased to satisfy business requirements as they chose. This was death to recordkeeping. Rules and procedures are constraints on that freedom but users have to be forced into using them. Tools such as Workflow can be integrated to beguile or compel the “user” to make records without being conscious of doing so, but Workflow is still a tool (part of the plumbing). In another session, [James Price](#) made the fundamental point that AI can remove the drudgery but it can't add quality; the foundation remains high quality, well ordered data to begin with. What little I know of AI leads me to think that it can be a powerful tool, but it is still part of the plumbing. As a mere Owl, I can't say how to use it that way. I'm past my use-by date. I can only point and say *Hey guys, it's over there*. It's for you to find the way.

PS. To hear the data managers talk, it is comforting (sort of) that some corporations, public and private, are realising at long last, and in a serious way, the need to control the vast swamp of unmanaged data they hold. Troubling, however, that archives are still seen as the end of a life cycle. What, after all, are the data attributes you need to manage memory that



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aren't also needed to manage records in the first place? Archiving begins the moment you hit the save button. And, because disciplined management doesn't have to be applied to all the data, selecting and targeting those which do is required; we call that appraisal.

2024, September 7:

<<25 June, 2024: Is legislation the right vehicle for r/keeping rules and practices ... Legislation with an internal focus is the government equivalent of rules and procedures promulgated within a private corporation, but much more inflexible and difficult to adjust to changing circumstances ... the key question is why should the regulation of government business practice be different from regulation of the private sector? Shouldn't we have the same set of external rules and procedures for both the public and the private sector? Shouldn't the archives authorities themselves be subject to those rules and procedures for their performance?>>

In Adelaide, at a session on Standards, [David Moldrich](#) explained how a new certification initiative under the [MSR framework](#) (Management System for Records) will work:

The ISO 30300 series of Management Systems for Records (MSR) standards were created to achieve the following objectives:

- 1. Connect records management to organizational success and accountability.*
- 2. Equip management with effective tools for systematic and verifiable record creation and control.*
- 3. Support organizations implementing ISO management systems standards by addressing their records management requirements.*

A 'management system' refers to how an organization manages different parts of its business in order to achieve its goals. An MSR is a specific management system designed to govern records.

If I heard him correctly, after a pilot program, real-world [audits](#) (certifications) are expected to begin in 2025. Cool!

I wonder if I'll still be alive to see how this all works out. I may even still be alive when our Federal, State, and Territory archives authorities submit themselves and their programs to audit (but I doubt it).

2024, September 8:

So, I'm asked, why should government agencies be subject to professional auditing? Aren't they already being looked after by the Auditors-General?

The Auditors-General (bless 'em) are our friends. They have in the past picked up on recordkeeping failures and long may they continue to do so. But, just as we don't expect Deloitte or Price Waterhouse to undertake specialist r/keeping audits of CBA or BHP, the A-Gs don't incorporate the specialist r/keeping skills needed. If they did, they would be quite capable of doing the audits, as would Deloitte and Price Waterhouse for that matter.

Some of the archives authorities are already deeply involved – e.g. [NSW State Records](#). This is all to the good. May they thrive in their endeavours. But, as the NSW site demonstrates, they are compromised so far as auditing is concerned - by their role in setting standards for government r/keeping, in deploying procedures and rules, and in advising on self-assessment. These are all good things in themselves but they debar the Archives from an audit role because being a player in the setting and execution of r/keeping standards makes them effectively a government-based equivalent of a consultant (as well as being the source of regulatory compliance requirements).



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As David argued cogently, you cannot consult and be an auditor. If you set the rules, you are forbidden from auditing their execution. The rule-maker must be audited along with the rule-keeper.

2024, September 9:

<<2024 Sep. 7: I may even still be alive when our Federal, State, and Territory archives authorities submit themselves and their programs to audit (but I doubt it)>>

How can such an audit be applied to the FS&T Archives (I am asked)? I have lost touch with the work of [IT21](#) and the related standards (national and international) but I would be surprised if they don't cover questions like:

- *Does your organisation have a r/keeping policy/plan?*
- *Are there procedures in place for implementing it?*
- *Is the work of implementation evaluated and shortcomings identified?*
- *What mechanism(s) exist for remediating identified shortcomings?*

Substitute “whole-of-government” for “organisation” and there is no problem. In a muddled, half-arsed kind of way, our Federal, State, and Territory archives authorities have (some of them) jurisdiction over r/keeping (or at least some aspects of it) within the whole-of-government. These questions can be legitimately addressed (even in a half-arsed, muddled kind of way) and the responses tested against demonstrated performance by organisations having such jurisdiction. And, if they can't be answered, a further question arises:

- *If you don't have jurisdiction, who does?*

If someone else is identified as being responsible, the questions can be put to them (if they've got the guts to allow themselves to be scrutinised).

2024, September 18:

Back from Adelaide, ensconced in my comfy billet in leafy Narara, I am reflecting on my time there. A very satisfactory conference. I feel I accomplished my purpose in going – viz. keeping in touch. And I became an Owl which was very gratifying.

You can't visit SA without hearing (at least once) their boast that they never had convicts. This is said sometimes with boastful smugness and otherwise with a kind of sheepish embarrassment. The claim is bogus. What does it even mean:

1. There never were convicts in SA? or
2. SA was never a convict settlement?

Were there ever convicts in SA?

The more plausible claim.

“... Just because there were no transported convicts to SA, doesn't mean there weren't any convicts there ... Records obtained by [Findmypast](#) reveal the two police officers, Josiah James Rogers and Thomas Jones, had rather deviously scored themselves positions in South Australia's first paid police force in 1838 ... when they were actually escaped convicts ... the Acting Governor ... expressed his "surprise and displeasure" upon their eventual discovery. Yet, according to the book [Turning Points](#): Chapters in South Australian History, edited by Robert Foster and Paul Sendziuk, the two police constables did not lose their jobs. Because "the work was so poorly-paid and replacements hard to find, the two men were allowed to remain in the force".

Transportation to NSW ended in 1840. There were [undoubtedly emancipist settlers](#) in SA and also “prisoners of the crown” living in SA by one means or another - the emancipists coming overland or by ship to SA from other colonies. Emancipation was governed by NSW laws relating to transportation but there doesn't seem to be any savings provisions (that I could find) relating to them when SA separated.



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Was SA ever a convict settlement?

Not “settled” as such, but certainly part of one. SA was founded in 1834 as a Province at which time the area now comprising SA was [legally part of NSW](#): Penal Colony (1788-1842) then Crown Colony (1842-1856).

Phillip, as [Governor of New South Wales](#), exercised nominal authority over all of Australia east of the [135th meridian east](#) between the latitudes of 10°37'S and 43°39'S, an area which includes modern New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania ... Phillip's claim included "all the islands adjacent in the [Pacific Ocean](#)", which he and his successors asserted to include what is now New Zealand ... In 1825 Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) became a separate colony and the western border of New South Wales was extended to the 129th meridian east (now the West Australian border) ...

Just like Tasmania, Victoria, and Queensland, technically therefore, SA was and forever remains a fragmented part of a Convict Settlement. Its constitutional history: Province (1834-1842), Crown Colony (1842-1857), and finally Self-Governing Colony (1857-1901) before becoming a State (1901-ct) places its (European) pre-history, between 1825 and 1834, firmly within the boundaries of a Convict Settlement.

Much of this is also true of New Zealand which it was claimed fell within the scope of Phillip's Commission (as “adjacent islands”) and which was (briefly) proclaimed to be part of NSW from 1840 to 1841.

[New Zealand is mentioned in the Australian Constitution](#) ... The colony of New Zealand participated in the early [Federation conferences](#). However, there was not a strong interest in New Zealand for joining with the Australian colonies to form a new country ... The Constitution gives New Zealand the option to join Australia. [Covering clause 6](#) of the Constitution states New Zealand may be admitted into Australia as a state. ([Section 121](#) provides the rules on how new states would be admitted.) As non-Australian citizens, New Zealanders cannot vote in Australian elections.

From my (now hazy) recollection, I **was** able to vote in [NZ elections](#) when I was there and also in Australian elections as well at the same time. When I was in NZ, I found that the descriptive archivists had identified post-colonial NZ as a “Realm”, quaint I thought. But how else would we describe Australia if we didn't have “Commonwealth” to use in its place?

PS. There is a *Wikipedia* article on the [Realm of NZ](#) but the term [Realm of Australia](#) doesn't seem to have taken root. Not to be confused with the [Commonwealth Realm](#) or the [Australasian Realm](#) (the latter a geographical term but one which might be usefully borrowed). We are, however, identified as one of the “realms” that are a [component segment](#) of the Commonwealth Realm. Would it still be a Commonwealth [Realm](#) if the nest British Monarch (and subsequent ones) was no longer [Head of the Commonwealth](#)?

Australian descriptive archivists take note. I don't suppose there are many searches on “realm” however.

PPS. It could legitimately be argued, in rebuttal, that SA (unlike the other three) never had an organised administration while it was geographically part of NSW.

2024, September 20:

<<9 Sep, 2024: How can such an audit be applied to the FS&T Archives? ... I would be surprised if [national and international standards] don't cover questions like: *Does your organisation have a r/keeping policy/plan?*, etc. etc. ... Substitute “whole-of-government” for “organisation” and there is no problem. In a muddled, half-arsed kind of way, our Federal, State, and Territory archives authorities have (some of them) jurisdiction over r/keeping (or at least some aspects of it) within the whole-of-government ... >>



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The possibilities give one, as Hercule Poirot was wont to say, *furiously to think*. Our government archives authorities have a final say (most of them) over records disposal within government – in whole or in part. Other factors apply, of course, but our focus lies on the discretion FS&Ts exercise in deciding what survives and what does not. Leaving aside questions that might be asked about how **complete** their coverage is and how **effective** their execution, it might be useful to look at how **coherently** those powers are being applied.

There was a time, not so long ago, when archivists spoke of [documentation strategies](#) – cf. Helen Samuels [Archivaria](#) 1991. The emphasis was on reversing the archivist's purview away from a reactive concern for what we should keep (from amongst the records that have in fact already been created by the time an appraisal begins) and onto a proactive effort to specify before action commences what records should be generated (analysing functions and specifying what records should be made to properly witness them). All this is relevant to community archiving but appraisal to determine (in the design stage) what records to make and keep is also particularly apposite when dealing with e/records.

Developing a documentation strategy for government is probably beyond the remit conferred by our out-dated archives laws, but it would certainly be possible for any audit of their activities to ask the question: *what overall plan or purpose guides your appraisal decisions?* What controlling intelligence (if any) lies behind the manifold appraisal decisions you render, case-by-case, to determine the make-up of the “archival resources” of your government? Are you looking backwards or forwards? What are you trying to achieve?

I haven't trawled their websites in search of such testimony. I may do so in coming weeks if I've nothing better to do. But the question is relevant in any case. Where does the public, other regulatory authorities, commissions of inquiry, the courts, government itself look for documentary evidence of what the FS&Ts think they're appraising **for**? Not woolly, feel-good statements but concrete, verifiable, measurable objectives and indicators of achievement. In short, how can we know if their discretion is being exercised wisely or even properly?

If such testimony exists, it would be the basis for audit assessment of their performance. If it does not exist, how are we to know that the multitude of appraisals undertaken are not capricious, idiosyncratic, inconsistent, and unaccountable?

PS. These questions are not unrelated to [Documenting Australian Society](#) which is, in aspiration at least, both **reactive** (“to preserve and provide access to documentary heritage in Australia [and] to enable nationwide holdings of documentary heritage that are inclusive and representative of the wide diversity of Australian experience and endeavors, past and present” and **proactive** (“we are interested in identifying and addressing gaps and silences in our national holdings of documentary heritage to ensure that current and future generations have access to evidence of distinctive aspects of Australian life that reflect the rich diversity and complexity of Australian society”).

2024, September 21:

<<19 Sep., 2023 AW: I don't understand archival theory talking about 'truth' at all; certainly not as something that recordkeepers (or archivists) seek out. The characteristics of good records are authenticity, reliability, and integrity, and even then it's more hope than certainty. Truth is something that the users of our records seek>>

How to hold the FS&Ts to account for their appraisals is not the problem. Standards relating to authenticity, reliability, and integrity are already there in the national and international standards and the methodology is to be found in the application of those standards using audit techniques. The problem is where to find comparable standards for what I might term



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the broader *poetical* side of r/keeping – the social and cultural aspects – in short, the search for Truth.

The national and international standards for r/keeping referenced at RIMPA 2024 are the work of many hands over several decades. [Documenting Australian Society](#) is a well-meaning effort but it has no more authority (or, at any rate, no more effect) than UN resolutions in Gaza. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that any such endeavour could (absent ideological pre-disposition) remain free of the turmoil we associate with the culture wars. How to avoid, in other words, the ill-tempered dominion sought by the SAA in its approach to DEI? Remember, it's not what these people believe that's their problem, it's their way of believing:

... I promise that I shall keep all these articles faithfully, entirely, and sincerely, and guard them inviolate, in no way deviating from them in teaching or in any way in word or in writing. Thus I promise, this I swear, so help me God. [The Anti-Modernist Oath](#)

SAA affirms that simply pledging nondiscrimination is insufficient „, we must make positive efforts to center diversity among our membership, our members' holdings, and our members' user communities ... The [SAA Code of Conduct](#) provides guidance on expectations for member conduct that are based on the core principles of this Statement on Diversity, Equity, [SAA Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#).

The SAA Council requires a diversity statement as part of the application process for elected positions and certain appointed positions ... A diversity statement: reflects on how one's identity and experience contribute to diversity; demonstrates awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues and how to frame and approach them ... It is highly recommended that the Diversity Statement incorporates answers, but are not limited, to the following questions ...

- Are you aware of your own implicit biases? How have you come to this realization and how do you continue to grow as an advocate for DEI?
- How do you reflect DEI in your work? How will you model a trauma-informed and inclusive practice, and mentor others who will work with you?

[SAA Guidelines for Preparing a Diversity Statement](#)

Supposing “[Mises's insights into peaceful social cooperation and tolerance](#)” were even possible, would we want that? How can Truth be thus [shackled](#)?

The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command. His heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease with which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate, the subtle arguments which he would not be able to understand, much less answer. And yet he was in the right! They were wrong and he was right.

And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'

A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics'. All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. [George Orwell, 1984]

Can tolerance and dispassion be mandated and would there not be rebels even then? And can we not see that *sincerity* is also a “great enemy” - if not to clear language, then to clear thinking?

I would like to believe that standards could be hammered out (by many hands over several decades) to measure the adequacy of the authenticity, reliability, and integrity of appraisal outcomes that were “*inclusive and representative of the wide diversity of Australian*



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experience and endeavors, past and present” and dispassionately addressed “gaps and silences in our national holdings of documentary heritage to ensure that current and future generations have access to evidence of distinctive aspects of Australian life that reflect the rich diversity and complexity of Australian society”.

But I have my doubts that such [beatitude](#) could be easily attained.

2024, October 28:

<<25 June, 2024: 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 ...>>

<<4 Sep., 2024: I’ve become an Owl - ... Recordkeeping is not a job description; it is an intellectual construct. An Information Manager might stumble across a record but it will by accident unless the work is informed by r/keeping knowledge ...>>

I’ve found myself still in NZ (unexpectedly) on their Labour Day holiday and the whole country seems to have gone to sleep. Nothing left to do but think.

<<3 Sep., 2018: From Glasgow (SCO) - The last ARA session I attended was called “Let digits flourish: the skills archivists need and how to get them” ... It was the wrong question (out of context, anyway). Before asking what skills we need, you have to know what you need the skills for ... Many terms were used in this session to describe what we do but recordkeeping wasn’t amongst them (at least, I didn’t hear it). They seem to think the “theory” is OK. If they mean the theory found in the old text books, it’s not. It isn’t wrong, but it’s not expansive enough ... Should we still teach palaeography? This? That? Coding? Something besides? Recordkeeping applies the same knowledge to all formats – mediaeval mss, files and dockets, digital assets, it’s all one. How to fit it into a one-year course? If it were me, I’d be designing a course that taught what it means to be a r/keeper. The skills needed to apply that knowledge into an increasingly diverse number of work situations are important and difficult to acquire in the right combination, but that’s secondary ...>>

Other professionals don’t finish their training as fully rounded practitioners. You have to be a doctor or nurse before up-skilling in obstetrics. You have to be a trained lawyer before mastering court procedure. Found myself thinking more-or-less the same thing in a session in Christchurch on “imagining the records and archives professions in 2050”. Didn’t hear a lot of it but I remember my friend Barbara Reed talking about connecting the dots. So much of the discourse at these conferences focusses on bits ‘n’ pieces of the Big Picture. To take just some from the two conferences I have attended this year –

- techniques for records-making and records-keeping,
- reparative social justice, redress, vicarious trauma,
- reparative description and repatriation,
- personal recordkeeping,
- proactive collecting,
- AI, digital r/keeping & preservation,
- standards, cultural considerations,
- respecting and capturing Indigenous knowledge, storytelling,
- user engagement and outreach,
- etc, etc, etc.

Things may seem fragmented at that granular level. But for me the Big Picture can be summed up in just four words:

- Make



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- Keep
- Full
- Accurate

There is nothing that I have heard at either of the two conferences I've attended this year that can't be understood within a [matrix](#) made up of those four quadrants. The details that people focus on are particular to a specialisation (and so they should be) but the Big Picture (and how each specialisation fits within it) shouldn't be lost sight of and should be acknowledged as our common, shared point of reference. It is a [lodestar](#) that directs our thinking and how we relate to each other and to the world. And, just as importantly, it defines what we are not.

This why I abhor the word "collection". It's not just a cosmetic thing; it's about a mind-set. Collectors are thinking about the gathered and the mortified, but recordkeepers (through the spirit that enlivens us) understand so much more. Our thinking, for example, also encompasses the un-gathered, the un-collected, the never-will-be-collected. If you think like a collector then you'll be one and you'll be the poorer for it. But if you think like an archivist your horizons will be broader and your understanding deeper. Be a collector, by all means, if that is your job description, but don't think like one. It's not nice.

Recordkeeping begins the moment a decision is made to put pen to paper (to document an event or circumstance) and archiving begins the moment we hit the "save" button. So long as we keep thinking like that, we'll be recordkeepers – something to be proud of.

2024, October 29:

On my way home, I've had to complete an inwards passenger card. It requires me to name my "usual occupation". These days, I should really put down "retired" but as this may very well be the last time I couldn't resist writing in "recordkeeper". There was just enough space.

2025, March 6: [Article by Tom Nesmith](#)

<<[Joanna Sassoon](#): I hope that many here will recognise the name of our esteemed Canadian colleague in [an article](#) he has written for the Winnipeg Free Press.>>

2025, March 7:

Resist or Lie Back and Enjoy It?

Tom Nesmith's article reminds us that form without substance cannot stop tyrants - that it is not the rules themselves but the piety of those who uphold and obey them that sustains virtue, that it is not the design of an information system that matters but how it is used. Two thousand years ago, Augustus effectively replaced the shattered remnants of the Roman Republic with a dictatorship that craftily enveloped the surviving forms of republican government:

Imagine a world in which political norms have broken down. Senators use bad faith arguments to block the government from getting anything done. An autocrat rigs elections and gives himself complete control over the government. Even stranger, many voters subscribe to the autocrat's personality cult and agree that he *should* have absolute control ... the republic's political norms had been breaking down for about a century, and Augustus was in a position to take advantage of that ... Before that ... Political norms were heeded; and when the government ran into a new problem, it would amend itself to keep working ... Edward J Watts [Mortal Republic: How Rome Fell Into Tyranny](#).

It is being argued that Trump, like Augustus, is not over-throwing a dysfunctional system but simply cementing into place a reality that has already overtaken it. Thus:

Many analysts have warned that the institutional tethers that restrained Trump in his first term would likely be much looser in the second ... Trump's behaviour should make us think again about the limits of the [US/Australian] alliance. It is a far shallower and more



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transactional thing than its Australian supporters like to believe ... As former Australian prime minister Paul Keating [notes](#), the president has so little time for the nostrums of Washington's foreign policy elites and such contempt for their "rules-based order" that he may very well concoct a grand bargain with Beijing that once and for all buries the idea of American primacy in Asia and opens an era of power-sharing with Beijing ... Sam Roggeveen [Why, for Australia, Trump's treatment of Canada is so troubling](#)

and

... What is surprising is how quickly Trump's approach across a wide range of domestic and international policies has been adopted as the new normal ... the United States' long-enduring "soft power", fashioned by American popular culture, has been hijacked almost overnight by Trump to touch a nerve of conservative, notably male, reaction around the world. And as far as we can gauge, in the suburbs and regions of [Australia](#). As a result, Trump's caudillo style of presidency is now the most prominent part of a continuum alongside Facebook and Instagram, a popular culture that is now the environment of mass attention.

There is more to this than simple aggression. Trump is also giving voice to a dramatically different style of American power ... Former Labor prime minister Paul Keating ... offers an important and hopeful point: that Trump may avoid a major war. Keating knows it is too early to be definitive in any assessments of Trump 2.0. But he has some confidence in discerning Trump's primary view of international strategic settings ...: "Donald Trump believes in American nationalism but he does not believe in American internationalism", Keating says. "Nor does he buy the idea of American exceptionalism, the idea that Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton and George W Bush were glued to. That in some way they had God's ear and that their job was the propagation of the faith – the values of their 'exceptional' state ... Trump's street smartness tells him this is nonsense. Though he lacks an analytic framework, his intuition pushes him past crude US policy dressed up as some rules-based order. He knows the key US rule is 'snatch and grab', a policy he understands and is okay with but will not eulogise.

"Trump's presidency could be central to him engineering avoidance of a third world war which the Democrats, in their manic commitment to primacy, were otherwise sliding towards – using Ukraine from 2014 as a US surrogate to contain Russia and their mealy-mouthed claim that China represented a military threat to the United States ... Keating clearly sees the potential for a new practice of American power and possible positives from it. As Keating puts it, it is in essence about "snatch and grab", echoing the greed that characterised America's foreign policy when first it placed its tread on the world stage in the late nineteenth century and took the Philippines.

... That thread of hope doesn't make it a benign policy, or a constructive one ... America has a massive savings paucity, the source of its current account deficit, and no amount of tariffs, quotas or threats, can bridge this savings gap. The tariffs are but a tactical remedy to a structural malignancy. And there should be a great deal more alarm than there is about Trump's approach to Greenland: the first time, in essence, that one member of NATO has virtually threatened military action against another member, or at the very least failed to rule out military action ... So Defence Minister Richard Marles, who like Coalition foreign minister Julie Bishop before him, studs his speeches with ritual incantations to the "rules-based order", might well be asked at his next press conference: "My dear minister, what part of the 'rules-based order' enables Trump to lay claim to Greenland?

James Curran [Paul Keating says Trump will save the world from WWII](#)

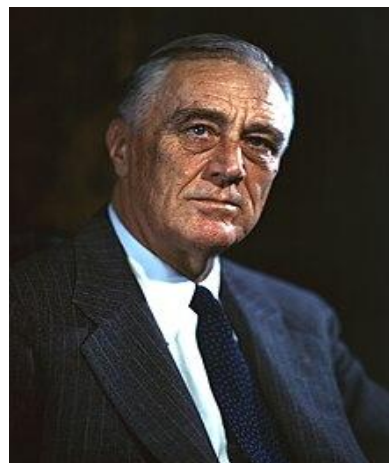
And if you can't stomach the new reality and you're up for a fight; if you think that Ukraine, Gaza, and Greenland should not just be tokens in a game of realpolitik, hearken to the words of Franklin D Roosevelt (1940 radio address on the eve of Hitler's assault on the West in response to suggestions that the US should broker a peace between the warring parties):

Today we seek a moral basis for peace. It cannot be a real peace if it fails to recognise brotherhood. It cannot be a lasting peace if the fruit of it is oppression, or starvation, or cruelty, or human life dominated by armed camps. It cannot be a sound peace if small nations must live in fear of powerful neighbours. It cannot be a moral peace if freedom from invasion is sold for tribute. It cannot be an intelligent peace if it denies free passage to that



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knowledge of those ideals which permit men to find common ground. It cannot be a righteous peace if worship of God is denied. Michael Fullilove [*Rendezvous with Destiny*](#) (Viking 2013) p.58



Reporting Back from Conferences

2018, August 17: From Washington DC – Part 1

... where I am attending the SAA Conference.

Technical Debt

Technical debt (also known as **design debt** or **code debt**) is a concept in [software development](#) that reflects the implied cost of additional rework caused by choosing an easy solution now instead of using a better approach that would take longer.^[2] Technical debt can be compared to monetary [debt](#).^[3] If technical debt is not repaid, it can accumulate ‘interest’, making it harder to implement changes later on. Unaddressed technical debt increases [software entropy](#). *Wikipedia*

Attended a panel session where a group of young archivists (well, they seemed young to me) explored how this concept, applied to quick-and-dirty methods, migration of digital assets and poor preservation, can be used in cost/benefit analysis, prioritization of work programmes, and in speaking to management (it is a concept they understand apparently). It enables you to identify a present cost of taking short-cuts by identifying future requirements (difficult to quantify but real all the same). Particularly useful, I imagine, when dealing with the we’ll-worry-about-it-tomorrow argument. Also, when handling legacy problems, you can use the concept to balance a once-only work-around solution against a one that also takes care of future possibilities. A good session and one which I hope will be of value in my own work.

An idea whose time has come?

Attending the description sessions hasn’t been the depressing experience I expected. They are making good progress in adapting the relational model (applied to three entity-types) to their descriptive ideas – cf. draft DACS Principle 4. They seem to think of it as three-entity model (with relationships). Dear me. They think it is an innovative concept developed by RiC. I decided that arguing the provenance of the idea would be counter-productive. So I bit my tongue. Sigh.

The [existing Principle Four](#) repeats the frightful multi-level rule

an archival description may consist of a multilevel structure that begins with a description of the whole and proceeds through increasingly more detailed descriptions of the parts, or it may consist only of a description of the whole.



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But the [new draft](#) says

Archivists expose contextual significance by describing records, agents, events, and the relationships between them.

Yay! They're still very collection focused and vestiges of ISDIAH remain. But green shoots are appearing in the manure. There is comfort with de-accessioning. And even talk of documenting the archivist's work as part of the descriptive endeavour. Yay again!

2018, August 20: [From Washington DC – Part 2](#)

The only earthly certainty is oblivion (Mark Twain)

Chatted over lunch with some v. young, bright, enthusiastic graduates – brimming with hope and ideas but (typical of their generation) tinged with hard edged realism and scepticism. Not yet soured though, like me. In discussion, it astonished me that they were wholly ignorant of the name and the work of David Bearman – until I remembered he is a prophet not honoured in his own country. I expounded a little and (being bright) they were intrigued, slightly appalled their teachers hadn't mentioned him, took notes, and said they'd be looking him up. A good day's work.

GLAM and the Search for Truth

The last session I attended was a panel – mostly about obstacles to GLAM-orous co-operation (routine stuff: funding, prioritization, professional differences, etc.). My worry remains that we'll be asked to surrender our speciality in pursuit of common ground. Sure enough, the archivist suggested we may have to relax descriptive standards in order to get along. He was an EAD guy, so perhaps his grasp of descriptive principles wasn't that secure to start with.

The best presentation was from the museum guy (Robert Stein). His argument was that the prior problem we face is public mistrust of information providers (including us) – the fake news, climate denying, flat earth, alien abduction, birther, antivax conspiracy theorists trust nothing and get their ideas from obscure Internet pages. Everyone else is confused by the noise. He argued that more than ever we can't take trust in our institutions for granted and that we need to work at restoring it for the resources we manage before useful co-operation can occur. I agree. I asked him afterwards if he thought this should be done globally (in the abstract) or granularly case by case. He thought this was a good question. So did I. I don't think it can be done in the abstract – that is beyond our power and our remit. But authenticity, reliability, accuracy are in our DNA, they are our core values, ones we share with curators and librarians. We can all make common cause presenting a shared persona as truth-tellers, insisting that accuracy matters and that we strive for it.

Michael Piggott has a great story about Bob Hawke and the reflecting pool at University House, Canberra. It's his story and I'll let him tell it. My example is James Thurber's *The Night the Dam Broke*. It tells how, one night, panic overtook the small town in which he grew up when a cry of alarm was raised that the dam had broken. People rushed from their beds and ran for the hills. But it was the Mid-West and there were no hills. If the dam had burst (it hadn't) the water would have risen only one inch. But in their panic people didn't stop to think about it. Michael's story also involves measuring the depth of the water.

My take out is this: GLAM can work collectively and aggressively to assert our shared credentials as truth tellers. When people are panicking, we need to be there for them, carrying rulers in our back pockets. PS. I'm not, of course, suggesting that our truths are settled and immutable. A professionally inspired process of revision is one of the things that makes them trust-worthy. Other sessions explored re-description and the exposure of flawed archival narratives.



2018, August 31: From Glasgow SCO – Part 1

... at the ARA Conference which has many sessions focused on community archiving, outreach directed towards marginalized communities, and re-imagining archival methods accordingly.

Community Archives

The emphasis is on archives dealing with communities and organized by the communities themselves. There was a great panel session presented by –

- Jack Latimer ([Community Sites](#)) who interprets and adapts archival methods for community archives initiatives; showcasing the [Yorkshire Dales History Project](#) in a well-established part of England with long-lived local connections.
- Marion Kenny showcasing the [Qisetna Project](#) amongst the Syrian diaspora using storytelling to capture and preserve memories of the Syrian community spread around the world; something I thought might work for the Palestinians.
- Alan Butler ([Plymouth LGBT Archive](#)) outlining work that draws a formerly marginalized community together, giving a voice to older members of that community, and educating younger ones on how things were (many apparently unbelieving about what went on).

It seems that some of these endeavours are moving through a new phase. Finds in attics, garages, and sheds are becoming rarer and people no longer use letters, photos, and diaries as they once did. Increasingly the raw material is digital and this presents new challenges. In the second keynote of the programme, which was less to my taste, [Michelle Caswell](#) made a case for what might be called weaponizing community archives.

Outreach

Another enthralling panel, with many cross-overs to community archiving, presented outreach efforts by established “collections” to reach marginalized audiences –

- Suzanne Rose and Anthony McCoubry of the [Mass Observation Archive](#) described their Out of the Box projects including work in prisons (“make sure you budget for biscuits”).
- Stephanie Neild of [Leonard Cheshire Disability](#) showed how their archives are being used by the disabled and visually impaired as well as creating a wider audience for their material.
- Tamsin Bookey of the [Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives](#) told how they are dealing with a community that is demographically 55% black, Asian, or mixed but whose user base is 60% white and not from the borough.

There was insightful commentary on how barriers to access aren’t always what archivists with comfortable middle-class backgrounds first think of (no home address, sight-impaired, can’t read).

2018, August 31: From Glasgow (SCO) – Part 2

We have met the enemy, and he is us

Fascinating presentation from Jenny Bunn (UCL) entitled “Machines make records: the future of archival processing” – an ironic contribution to a conference whose theme is “People Make Records”. Dense and cutting-edge argument that I couldn’t take down fast enough to do justice in a posting like this. Get hold of it if you can. Instead I will put down some thoughts it provoked in me.

Bunn reminded us that at the dawn of our digital dilemmas (when some of us thought that doom was about to be visited on the r/keeping enterprise by an indifferent technology), David Bearman posed two problems:



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1. We are too small to have any impact on the IT industry or to justify, in terms of financial return, any R&D into finding solutions to our particular requirements.
2. In any case, we have no clear understanding to communicate of what it is we want to achieve and how we want to achieve it.

R&D has been driven by other sectors (security, health, finance) but they are recordkeeping mammals too. Bunn points out, and I think many will agree, that the IT industry has moved on to the point that r/keeping (or something very like it) is now a generic requirement and systems capable of effectively supporting it to a large extent already exist. In other words, the IT world is close to annihilating the first of David's problems. It's not about accepting store-bought solutions, however. We still have a ways to go in articulating our special needs but a response can be much more easily incorporated into system design as it has developed – having already come a long, long way towards meeting them.

But what of the second problem? Are we any closer to a shared view of what we want and how we want to do it? The majors in Oz are deploying proprietary software but whether their articulation of our common requirements is any good (or even represents a coherent commonality amongst themselves) is a whole other question which I won't get into here. Outside of the majors, and inside them as well for that matter, my sense is that we are hardly further along than we were when David posed the second of his problems all those years ago. How ironic it will be if our inability to influence and take full advantage of what technology now has to offer arises from our own confusions. If doom does engulf us after all it would not be an uncaring technology but we ourselves who will have visited it upon us.

For smaller players, Bunn raised the question of tool kit vs systems.

2018, September 3: From Glasgow (SCO) - postscript

From Hong Kong actually on my way home.

The last ARA session I attended was called "Let digits flourish: the skills archivists need and how to get them". I feel guilty about posting this because I said nothing. They were having a good time and I didn't want to be a wet blanket. But the real reason is that I'm old and I'm sick and tired of saying the same thing, unheeded, over and over.

It was the wrong question (out of context, anyway). Before asking what skills we need, you have to know what you need the skills for. Substitute "methods" for "skills" and it's the same issue Bearman posed thirty years ago. Many terms were used in this session to describe what we do but recordkeeping wasn't amongst them (at least, I didn't hear it). They seem to think the "theory" is OK. If they mean the theory found in the old text books, it's not. It isn't wrong, but it's not expansive enough. It was devised to support a set of skills that evolved in the pre-digital world. We need a larger theoretical understanding and the post-Bearman thinking that has been done on that is the most important professional development of my generation. That's what appalled me about the ignorance of the young graduates in Washington about David's name and work.

Should we still teach palaeography? This? That? Coding? Something besides? Recordkeeping applies the same knowledge to all formats – mediaeval mss, files and dockets, digital assets, it's all one. How to fit it into a one-year course? If it were me, I'd be designing a course that taught what it means to be a r/keeper. The skills needed to apply that knowledge into an increasingly diverse number of work situations are important and difficult to acquire in the right combination, but that's secondary. What, if anything, is a recordkeeper? Someone who understands about documented evidence of circumstance or action. Who values the importance of context (they knew about that in Glasgow). Who comprehends structure and relationships. Who discriminates on the basis of process and evaluates on the basis of integrity.



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The same issue arose (sort of) in Washington about GLAM-orous co-operation. They were burbling on about how and what the obstacles are but it was the museums guy who asked why. We can be something more than r/keepers when we join with librarians and curators in a common cause as truth-tellers. At both conferences, the usual suspects stood up and attacked, with facility and insouciance, our values of objectivity (not neutrality), impartiality (not even-handedness), and accuracy (not abdication). When I hear this, I cringe: professional suicide I think. Yes, these are difficult concepts, in need of nuance and qualification, but they're the values that make us what we are. How's this for a slogan: guardians for truth. Twenty years ago, I would have said pompous over-reach. Not anymore. In a post-Trump world, it's what we need to assert about ourselves, to champion, and it's something to be proud of.

2018, September 6:

For those interested, Jenny Bunn has posted [a version of her talk](#) to the ARA Conference ...

2019, October 23: Adelaide 2019 – GOVSIG

On Monday, in a presentation by one of the Oz archives authorities, one of the slides presented some interesting metrics. It went something like this:

- Total holdings expressed as kilometres. I assume that means non-digital holdings and (although this is not a thought I imagine has yet passed through the mind of the institution concerned) I take this to refer to assets held or under control.
- Digital holdings (ditto re held or control) expressed as terabytes. Unclear whether this means digitised assets (digital or scanned renditions of portion of total non-digital holdings) or digital assets (born digital material now held or under control) or both.
- Assets online expressed as a %. My question was a percentage of what? A figure of 4.6% was offered but 4.6% of what remained unclear. It could be that 4.6% of total holdings has been digitised and is now online. Or, it could be that 4.6% of what has been digitised is online (and inferentially that 95.4% of what has been digitised is not on line). Or it could mean that 4.6% of digital holdings is on line. Or it could mean that 4.6% of digitised + digital is on line.

Once upon a time, archival statistics were compiled and published under the hand of the excellent Peter Crush. I am told this no longer happens or (if they are compiled) that they are no longer published. I may be misinformed. Anyway, I would like to know these numbers for NAA, Archives NZ, and for each of the State and Territory Archives. I could apply to them severally but it would be so much easier if they were just to post them to this list. What I want to know:

1. What is the volume of non-digital assets you hold or control?
2. What percentage has been digitised?
3. What is the quantity of digitised assets as a percentage of your non-digital assets?
4. What percentage of your digitised assets is available publicly on line?
5. What is the volume of born-digital assets you hold or control?
6. What percentage of your born digital assets is available publicly on line?

My continuing interest is the [impact and implications if digitisation](#) on our public archives programmes. Failing a response on the list, I will look for annual reports and, failing that, I'll write to them direct and post the responses (if any). Don't hold your breath.

<<Damien (SROWA): The stats are published annually ...The data goes back a ways i.e. the spreadsheets incorporate earlier stats. Fascinating stuff.>>



2019, October 24:

Wow! How prompt is that. Thank you, Damien. I will scrutinise them when I get back to sleepy Gosford. Fascinating indeed. Do you compile them for CAARA or are you just a numbers nut like me? What a pity we don't have regularly updated metrics for the entire sector since ACA was abolished. I've been thinking some more about the terminology (i.e. the conceptualisation) used when "measuring" the digital. I use

- "digitised" for scans or digital renditions of non-digital assets and
- "digital" for born digital

but I don't have a term for the two of them combined. Maybe digitised and born-digital would be closer to our current usage with digital used to describe them combined - but I see room for confusion and sloppy thinking with that. And the question arises: what do we count? If we say we hold XXX terabytes (or whatever) what does that mean? Replication (exact or otherwise), rendition, and redaction/enhancement (to say nothing of re-use and re-contextualisation) are features of managing data. Does a holding figure include or exclude multiple renditions of the same thing? What modifications make it something new and eligible to be counted again? Are terabytes the best unit of measurement for both structured data and unstructured records? Surely other people have grappled with this and maybe come up with solutions.

Many years ago, the film archivist at Archives NZ made what I thought was a profound comment - drawing attention to parallels between the techniques of film archiving (with its focus on the content carried rather than carrier) and data archiving. The source film stock, the master copy, the first generation copies (from which other copies are made), and the multiplicity of use copies are all one thing - a moving image existing in many replications (copies) or renditions (change of format, edits, etc.). Preserving the film stock is unimportant unless that has a specific purpose beyond its transitory utility as host for the image. Maybe there are clues to be found there.

2024, October 26: What I heard in Christchurch

On my way back from Christchurch and the ASA/Aranz/Parbica Conference. Didn't hear most of it because I left my hearing aids at home. One session I did get to hear (because it came in by video link and the audio was fine) was Lachlan Glanville's excellent paper *The Map is (not) the Territory: Harmonising and expanding descriptive models at the University of Melbourne Archives*. I have quibbles with some of their answers but they're certainly asking the right questions. I've been advised by my medical team (at my age you don't just have a single doctor, you have a "team") to avoid quibbling and quarrelling anymore because it is unseemly in a man of my years and because it may be injurious to my health. But I can't help myself.

Necessary elements for Mighty-Record to exist (as a record)



There are three elements (and only three) that are indispensable for a record to exist and function as a record.

- ♦ **Identity:** because every record is unique
- ♦ **Date(s):** because every record is time-bound
- ♦ **Relationships:** because no record stands alone

See: [*Records in Context \(RiC\) 1.0 – Comments on First Draft \(2016\)*](#)

There are many other possible attributes that are nice to have but they are not essential. I am told that "name" is essential because sometimes Mighty-Record will have no other



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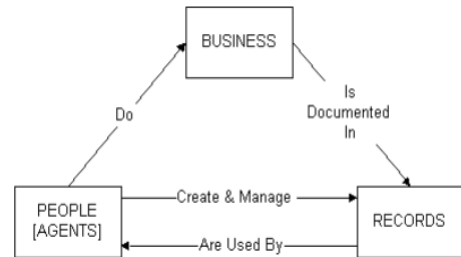
identity. But if Mighty-Record's name is being used for Id purposes, then (conceptually) it isn't a name-attribute, it's an identity-attribute. The same value might be repeated in a name field, but that's a different story.

The entity model

MUA have chosen a four-entity model where they should have stuck to three. They have Doer ([HCPR U 1.003.2](#)), Deed ([HCPR U 1.003.1](#)), and Document ([HCPR U 1.003.2](#)). They don't call them that but that's what they are. Of course, these are entity-types, they only become entities in application.

See [Some things archivists do – description and arrangement](#) (2012) p.14-18

Figure Three : The Three-Entity Model²².



But MUA also have Place. Bad idea. They rightly say that Date can't be an entity. Maybe this refers to some madcap RiC notion (but I've stopped following RiC's development so I just don't know). There was also talk at some stage (I can't remember by who or is it by whom) of making Relationship(s) an entity. Sooo silly. RiC has gone to town with relationships now but I'm not sure how usefully. When I tuned out, they were scaling down the number by using relationship-types (as they should have done in the first place).

Place needs to be controlled taxonomically like name authority, subject, period, etc. to provide values for Mighty-Record's attributes.

Don John of Austria is going to the war

But Don John wasn't Austrian he was Spanish, or maybe Belgian. His great-grandfather was Austrian but he became a Burgundian by marriage and Burgundy includes Belgium (which didn't even exist as such at that time – neither does Burgundy anymore). Say what? Isn't Burgundy a wine-growing region in France? Ah, no. You're thinking of the County; I'm talking about the Duchy. Confusin' ain't it? Such confusion needs to be managed outside the entity-model.

Other processes, such as assigning Id code(s), will also support an application. In computerised systems these will probably be auto-generated but there will still have to be a controlling mind for outreach purposes – viz. collaboration and global searching. Hoping for too much?

*He had brought a large map representing the sea,
Without the least vestige of land;
And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be
A map they could all understand.*

.....
*"Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
But we've got our brave captain to thank;
(So the crew would protest) that he's brought us the best –
A perfect and absolute blank."*

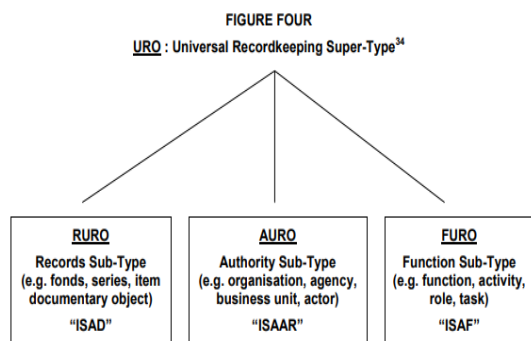
See [Hunting the snark; looking for digital series](#) (2011) p.10

Of course, MUA is reporting a local variant so they can be excused for not posing that question, but none of us can be excused from the obligation to re-imagine what we are doing – not about the kind of materials we are dealing with but how we understand them.

See [Some things archivists do – description and arrangement](#) (2012) p.21



Incorporating scalability



Using an object-oriented approach, assigning attributes to Mighty-Record begins with the URO (Universal Recordkeeping Object aka HERO: Hurley's Enduring Recordkeeping Object). The attributes can thus be arrayed so as to provide for real-world instances of the theoretical model to be scaled up or down without the baleful side-effects of the dreadful multi-level rule.

See [Documenting archives and other records](#) (2008), pp.17-19.

It is depressing that MUA has to reinvent the wheel like this, but what else are they to do? After more than thirty years, there is still no acceptable consensus on descriptive standards, much less available software options incorporating them (there can't be because the standards don't exist in usable form). Expatriating my own parochial views in a wider context began for me in the early 1990s when I joined the ICA Commission on Descriptive Standards – unwilling and unwelcome. We all ought now to be ashamed. The job was there to do and we haven't done it – despite an inordinate expenditure of time and effort. We should, after all that time, have a rigorous and clear-sighted understanding of the task and a common determination to achieve it but what we have, it seems, is so hidebound that people are welcoming RiC's "flexibility" as an escape from it (at least they were, at Riga, in 2017).

See [RiC at Riga](#) (2017)

PS Nothing against a flexible approach, provided it's done within a clear conceptual framework – *flexibility is not the same as lack of direction*.

2024, October 27:

<<Maybe this refers to some madcap RiC notion (but I've stopped following RiC's development so I just don't know) ... We all ought now to be ashamed. The job was there to do and we haven't done it – despite an inordinate expenditure of time and effort.>>

It's been pointed out to me that these two statements are inconsistent. If I've stopped following developments, I've no business pontificating about having to be ashamed now because we haven't done it.

This is true. Maybe we have done it and I haven't been paying attention.

Anyway, I'm justly rebuked.



2024, June 3: [The pleasures of recordkeeping](#)

At times ... I would say to Herbert ... *"My dear Herbert, we are getting on badly."* *"My dear Handel,"* Herbert would say to me, in all sincerity, *"if you will believe me, those very words were on my lips, by a strange coincidence."* *"Then, Herbert,"* I would respond, *"let us look into our affairs."* ... We ordered something rather special for dinner ... in order that our minds might be fortified ... Dinner over, we produced a bundle of pens, a copious supply of ink, and a goodly show of writing and blotting paper. For there was something very comfortable in having plenty of stationery.

... Each us would then refer to a confused heap of papers ... which had been thrown into drawers, worn into holes in pockets, half-burnt in lighting candles, stuck for weeks into the looking-glass, and otherwise damaged. The sound of our pens going refreshed us exceedingly, insomuch that I sometimes found it difficult to distinguish between this



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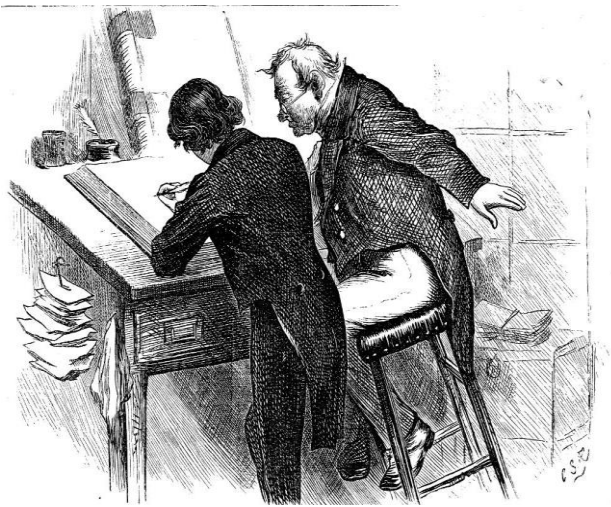
edifying business proceeding and actually paying the money ... “*They are mounting up, Handel,*” Herbert would say; “*upon my life, they are mounting up.*” “*Be firm, Herbert ... Look the thing in the face ... Stare them out of countenance.*” ... After a time, he would give up once more, on the plea that he had not got Cobbs’s bill, or Lobbs’s, or Nobbs’s ... “*Then, Herbert, estimate, estimate it in round numbers, and put it down.*” “*What a fellow of resource you are! ... Really your business powers are very remarkable.*”

I thought so too. I established with myself, on these occasions, the reputation of a first-rate man of business – prompt, decisive, energetic, clear, cool-headed ... My self-approval when I ticked an entry was quite a luxurious sensation. When I had no more ticks to make, I folded all my bills up uniformly, docketed each on the back, and tied the whole into a symmetrical bundle ... there was a calm, a rest, a virtuous hush, consequent on these examinations of our affairs, that gave me, for the time, an admirable opinion of myself ... I would sit with his symmetrical bundle and my own on the table before me among the stationery, and feel like a Bank of some sort, rather than a private individual ...

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* [Ch. XXXIV](#)



[Great Expectations](#)



[Tim Linkinwater](#)

2024, June 10:

It was a sight to behold Tim Linkinwater slowly bring out a massive ledger and day-book, and, after turning them over and over, and affectionately dusting their backs and sides, open the leaves here and there, and cast his eyes, half mournfully, half proudly, upon the fair and unblotted entries. “*Four-and-forty year, next May! ... Many new ledgers since then. Four-and-forty year!*” Tim closed the book again. “*Come, come,*” said Nicholas, “*I am all impatience to begin.*”

Tim Linkinwater shook his head with an air of mild reproof. Mr. Nickleby was not sufficiently impressed with the deep and awful nature of his undertaking. Suppose there should be any mistake — any scratching out! Young men are adventurous. It is extraordinary what they will rush upon, sometimes. Without even taking the precaution of sitting himself down upon his stool, but standing leisurely at the desk, and with a smile upon his face — actually a smile — there was no mistake about it; Mr. Linkinwater often mentioned it afterwards — Nicholas dipped his pen into the inkstand before him, and plunged into the books of Cheeryble Brothers!

Tim Linkinwater turned pale, and tilting up his stool on the two legs nearest Nicholas, looked over his shoulder in breathless anxiety. Brother Charles and brother Ned entered the counting-house together; but Tim Linkinwater, without looking round, impatiently waved his hand as a caution, and followed the nib of the inexperienced pen with strained and eager eyes ... At length, he drew a long slow breath, and, still maintaining his position on the tilted



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stool, glanced at brother Charles, secretly pointed with the feather of his pen towards Nicholas. And nodded his head in a grave and resolute manner, plainly signifying "He'll do."

... *"He has done it! ... His capital B's and D's are exactly like mine; he dots all his small i's and crosses every t as he writes it. There an't such a young man as this in all London ... not one. Don't tell me! The City can't produce his equal. I challenge the City to do it!"*

Charles Dickens *Nicholas Nickleby* [Ch. XXXVII](#)



Circumlocution Office



James Hacker

2024, June 12:

The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most important Department under Government. No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office ... If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several sacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office ... Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving--HOW NOT TO DO IT.

... the Circumlocution Office went on mechanically, every day, keeping this wonderful, all-sufficient wheel of statesmanship, *How not to do it*, in motion ... the Circumlocution Office was down upon any ill-advised public servant who was going to do it, or who appeared to be by any surprising accident in remote danger of doing it, with a minute, and a memorandum, and a letter of instructions that extinguished him ... Mechanics, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress grievances, jobbing people, jobbed people, people who couldn't get rewarded for merit. and people who couldn't get punished for demerit, were all indiscriminately tucked up under the foolscap paper of the Circumlocution Office.

... Numbers of people were lost in the Circumlocution Office. Unfortunates with wrongs, or with projects for the general welfare (and they had better have had wrongs at first, than have taken that bitter English recipe for certainly getting them), who in slow lapse of time and agony had passed safely through other public departments; who, according to rule, had been bullied in this, over-reached by that, and evaded by the other; got referred at last to the Circumlocution Office, and never reappeared in the light of day. Boards sat upon them, secretaries minuted upon them, commissioners gabbled about them, clerks registered, entered, checked, and ticked them off, and they melted away. In short, all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office, except the business that never came out of it; and its name was Legion ...



Charles Dickens *Little Dorrit* [Ch. 10](#)

2024, June 15:

James Hacker: How am I going to explain the missing documents to "The Mail"?

Sir Humphrey Appleby: Well, this is what we normally do in circumstances like these.

James Hacker: [reads memo] *This file contains the complete set of papers, except for a number of secret documents, a few others which are part of still active files, some correspondence lost in the floods of 1967...* Was 1967 a particularly bad winter?

Sir Humphrey Appleby: No, a marvellous winter. We lost no end of embarrassing files.

James Hacker: [reads] *Some records which went astray in the move to London and others when the War Office was incorporated in the Ministry of Defence, and the normal withdrawal of papers whose publication could give grounds for an action for libel or breach of confidence or cause embarrassment to friendly governments.* That's pretty comprehensive. How many does that normally leave for them to look at? How many does it actually leave? About a hundred?... Fifty?... Ten?... Five?... Four?... Three?... Two?... One?... Zero?

Sir Humphrey Appleby: Yes, Minister.

(Source: <http://www.imdb.com/character/cho030014/quotes>)

Edit: Although apparently a similar real-life incident occurred when Hurricane Sandy wiped out a significant portion of an FBI record archive:

<https://nsarchive.wordpress.com/2014/09/16/archival-neglect-...>

'What's an official reply?' I wanted to know. 'It just says,' Bernard explained, "'the Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter.'" Then we reply. Something like: "The matter is under consideration." Or even, if we feel so inclined, "under active consideration!" 'What's the difference between "under consideration" and "under active consideration"?' I asked. "'Under consideration" means we've lost the file. "Under active consideration" means we're trying to find it!' (*The Complete Yes Minister*, p. 33)

Sir Humphrey tried a new tack. 'We have not done the paperwork.' I ignored this rubbish. Paperwork is the religion of the Civil Service. I can just imagine Sir Humphrey Appleby on his deathbed, surrounded by wills and insurance claim forms, looking up and saying, 'I cannot go yet, God, I haven't done the paperwork.' (*The Complete Yes Minister*, p. 42)

I asked if a failure to complete returns is all that serious. ... 'If local authorities don't send us the statistics we ask for, then government figures will be nonsense. They'll be incomplete.' I pointed out that government figures are a nonsense anyway. No one denied it, but Bernard suggested that Sir Humphrey wanted to ensure that they are a complete nonsense. (*The Complete Yes Minister*, p. 493)

Apprehensively, he asked for my suggestions, and their rationale. I gave him these thoughts to ponder:

1. Minutes do not record everything that was said at a meeting.
2. People frequently change their minds during a meeting.
3. Minutes, by virtue of the selection process, can never be a true and complete record.
4. Therefore, what is said at a meeting merely constitutes the choice of ingredients for the minutes.
5. The secretary's task is to choose, from a jungle of ill-digested ideas, a version that represents the Prime Minister's views as he would, on reflection, have liked them to emerge.

Later today Bernard returned to my office, still confused. He had considered all I had said and likened the question of ingredients to cooking. A dangerous analogy. It is better not to use the verb 'cook' in connection with either books or minutes. Once again this raised the



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question of truth (whatever that may be) and Bernard's erroneous belief that minutes must in some way constitute a true record. Patiently, I approached the matter from an alternative point of view. I explained the following points as clearly as I could:

1. The purpose of minutes is not to record events.
2. The purpose is to protect people.
3. You do not take notes if the Prime Minister says something he did not mean to say, especially if this contradicts what he has said publicly on an issue.
4. In short, minutes are constructive. They are to improve what is said, to be tactful, to put in a better order.
5. There is no moral problem. The secretary is the Prime Minister's servant. In short, the minute is simply a note for the records and a statement of action (if any) that was agreed upon.

(Yes Prime Minister II, pp. 59-60)

[When I was a/g Secretary to AACOBS (back in the 1970s) the indomitable Harold White (then National Librarian) vetted the minutes of Standing Committee before I sent them out. On one occasion, he insisted that I change the record. He had absented himself to go to the loo during that discussion (which was true) and he said that he had no recollection of what I had set down. So, out it came. Who said you couldn't make this stuff up?]

2024, June 16:

Locke first began keeping [common place books](#) in 1652, his first year at Oxford ... he [explains the index](#), which contains a line for every letter of the alphabet and a subdivision along the lines of vowels:

"If I would put anything in my Common-place Book, I find out a head to which I may refer it. Each head ought to be some important and essential word to the matter in hand; and in that word regard is to be had to the first letter, and the vowel that follows it; for upon these two letters depends the use of the index ... When I meet with any thing worth putting into my Common-Place-Book, I presently look for a proper Head ... When the two pages designed for one class are full, I look forwards for the next backside of a leaf that is blank. ... At the tip of this new backside of a leave, I set down the number of the page I filled last. By these numbers, which refer to one another, the first whereof is at the bottom of one page, and the second is at the beginning of another, one joins matter that is separated, as if there was nothing between them ... Every time I put a number at the bottom of a page, I put it also into the index; but when I put only a V, I make no addition to the index ..."

... At the time Locke's method offered a solution to one of the biggest problems of commonplace books: how many pages to assign in a blank notebook to a new subject. By means of an example, one of Newton's notebooks, "Certain Philosophical Questions," which he began at Cambridge in 1664, listed 37 heads with a rather unsuccessful guess at the number of pages each would require. Locke's method required no pre-assigned pages, which made it more useful for both the diversity of information one kept and the size of the repository.

In a paper read before the Statistical Society at the close of the year 1840, and published in the Journal of the Statistical Society of London, Henry John Porter, commented:

It is strange, indeed, that such a man as Locke, impressed with the value of method, should ever have adopted so imperfect and arbitrary a plan, or having once adopted it, that he should not have improved upon it' for, surely, nothing can be more opposed to all method than the grouping of subjects together without any other bond of connection than an initial letter and a first vowel ...

[Locke's "strange method" is, in fact, akin to what we would call top-numbering.]

PS <<akin to what we would call top-numbering>>



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Also akin to the idea that a fonds or series (or part files in a registry) need not be kept together physically provided you have a finding aid that links the parts by location and (I think) one of the underlying principles of digital storage.

<< a solution to one of the biggest problems of commonplace books: how many pages to assign in a blank notebook to a new subject ... more useful for both the diversity of information one kept and the size of the repository>>

Also puts me in mind of a strange experience I had while studying in London in 1974/75. The whole class was taken on an excursion to Maidstone, site of the [Kent County Archives](#), said to be an exemplar for up-to-date records management in the whole of Great Britain, according to one of our occasional lecturers ([Felix Hull](#)). It was, from memory, then situated in old premises with an adjacent building across a cobblestone yard that had once been a storehouse of some kind (for wool or grain or some such, I imagine). The adjacent building was a record centre for “intermediate records” on their way into Archives storage.

The man conducting the visit carefully explained that Kent had adopted the three-stage review method of appraisal then being practiced, from memory, by PRO (now National Archives). As part of my secondment (unrelated to course-work) I had gone on field trips with PRO Inspecting Officers as they reviewed and appraised government files in departmental storage, so I knew how the system worked (more-or-less).

He explained how the Kent system operated. Intermediate records were brought in and kept in the adjacent building during the reviews. It was fortunate, he said, that the old warehouse they had inherited, now the records centre, provided them with three floors. I had developed a kind of rapport with a fellow student who was from what was then called Rhodesia (and who, like me, regarded some British recordkeeping practices as quaint). We looked at each other as if to say: “Oh, no! He’s not going to say it. Surely, he’s not going to say it?” But he did. On arrival, records were hauled up to the top floor. Then, after first stage review, the remainder were moved to the intermediate level and, after a second review, the survivors were relocated to the ground floor where, following a last appraisal, those deemed worthy of permanent retention could “conveniently” be trundled across the court-yard into the Archives for permanent storage.

I wonder what John Locke would have made of that.

2024, June 27:

Darwin’s notebooks lie at the tail end of a long and fruitful tradition that peaked in Enlightenment-era Europe, particularly in England: the practice of maintaining a “commonplace” book. Scholars, amateur scientists, aspiring men of letters – just about anyone with intellectual ambition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – was likely to keep a commonplace book. The great minds of the period – Milton, Bacon, Locke – were zealous believers in the memory-enhancing powers of the commonplace book. In its most customary form, “commonplacing”, as it was called, involved transcribing interesting or inspirational passages from one’s reading, assembling a personalized encyclopedia of quotations ...

Steven Johnson, [Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation](#) (2010)

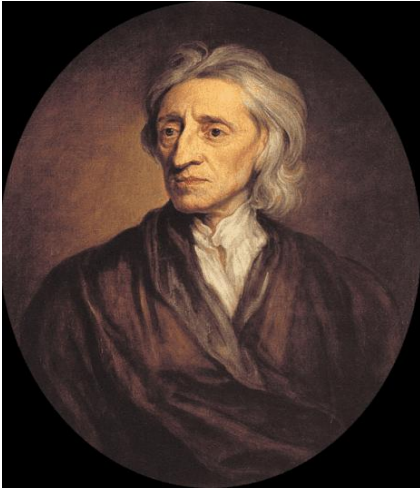
For, what though his *Head* be empty, provided his *Common place-Book* be full; And if you will bate him but the Circumstances of *Method*, and *Style*, and *Grammar*, and *Invention*; allow him but the common Privileges of transcribing from others, and digressing from himself, as often as he shall see Occasion; He will desire no more Ingredients towards sitting up a Treatise, that shall make a very comely Figure on a Bookseller’s Shelf, there to be preserved neat and clean, for a long Eternity, adorn’d with the Heraldry of its



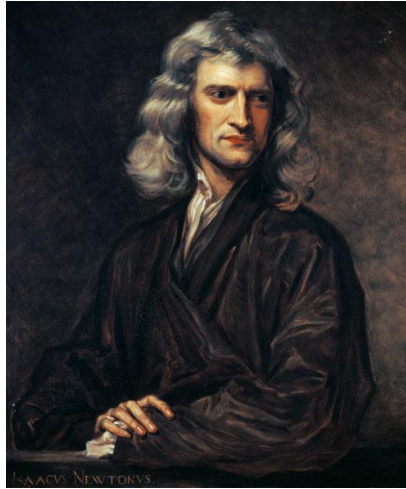
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Title, fairly inscribed on a Label; never to be thumb'd or greas'd by Students, nor bound to everlasting Chains of Darkness in a Library ...

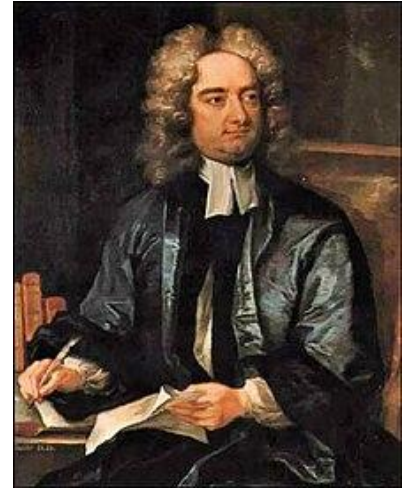
Jonathan Swift, "A Digression in Praise of Digressions," [*A Tale of a Tub: Written for the Universal Improvement of Mankind. To Which is Added, An Account of a Battel Between the Ancient and Modern Books in St. James's Library*](#) (1704)



John Locke



Isaac Newton



Jonathan Swift

*The better life begins; the world no more / Molests us; all its records we erase
From the dull common-place book of our lives, / That like a palimpsest is written o'er
With trivial incidents of time and place, / And lo! The ideal, hidden beneath, revives.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow "[Night](#)"

2024, August 15:

Mr. Swiveller pulled off his coat and folded it up with great elaboration, staring at Miss Sally all the time ... and opened his eyes so wide, that it appeared quite out of the question that he could ever close them any more. When he had looked so long that he could see nothing, Dick took his eyes off the fair object of his amazement, turned the leaves of the draft he was to copy, dipped his pen into the inkstand, and at last, and by slow approaches, began to write. But he had not written half a dozen words when, reaching over to the inkstand to take a fresh dip, he happened to raise his eyes, and there was the intolerable brown headdress – there was the green gown --- there, in short, was Miss Sally Brass, arrayed in all her charms, and more tremendous than ever.

This happened so often, that Mr. Swiveller by degrees began to feel strange influences creeping over him – horrible desires to annihilate this Sally Brass – mysterious promptings to knock her head-dress off and try how she looked without it. There was a very large ruler on the table ... Mr. Swiveller took it up and began to rub his nose with it ... poising it in his hand and giving it an occasional flourish after the tomahawk manner ... In some of these flourishes it went close to Miss Sally's head ... yet still the unconscious maiden worked away and never raised her eyes ... It was a good thing to write doggedly and obstinately until he was desperate, and then to snatch up the ruler and whirl it about the brown head-dress with the consciousness that he could have it off if he liked. It was a good thing to draw it back, and rub his nose very hard with it, if he thought Miss Sally was going to look up, and to recompense himself with more hardy flourishes when he found she was still absorbed. By these means Mr. Swiveller calmed the agitation of his feelings ... and he could even write as many as half a dozen consecutive lines without having recourse to it, -- which was a great victory.

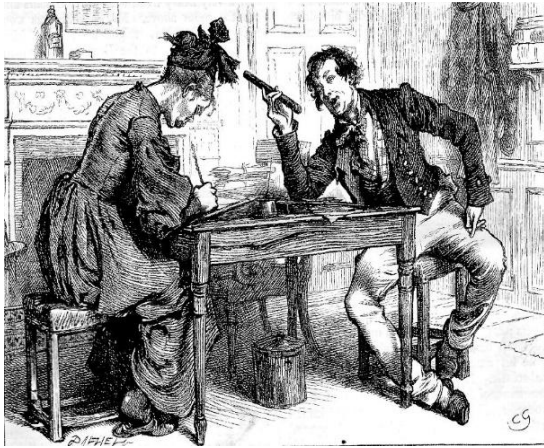
In course of time ... Miss Sally arrived at the conclusion of her task, and recorded the fact by wiping her pen upon the green gown ... arose from her stool, tied her papers into a



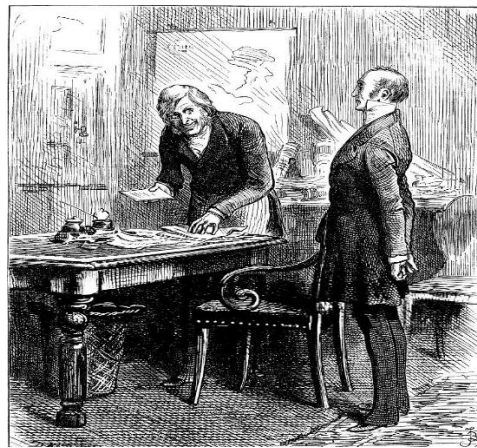
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formal packet with red tape, and taking them under her arm, marched out of the office. Mr. Swiveller had scarcely sprung off his seat and commenced ... a maniac hornpipe, when he was interrupted, in the fulness of his joy at being again alone, by the opening of the door, and the reappearance of Miss Sally's head. "I am going out," said Miss Brass. "Very good, ma'am," returned Dick. "And don't hurry yourself on my account to come back, ma'am," he added inwardly. "If anybody comes on office business, take their messages, and say that the gentleman who attends to that matter isn't in at present." "I will, ma'am." "I shan't be very long." "I am sorry to hear it, ma'am," rejoined Dick when she had shut the door. "I hope you may be unexpectedly detained ma'am. If you could manage to be run over, ma'am, not seriously, so much the better."

Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* Ch. [XXXIII](#)/[XXXIV](#)



Mr. Swiveller



Mr Carker

2024, August 22:

Mr Carker the Manager sat at his desk, smooth and soft as usual, reading those letters which were reserved for him to open, backing them occasionally with such memoranda and references as their business purport required, and parcelling them out into little heaps for distribution through the several departments of the House. The post had come in heavy that morning, and Mr Carker the Manager had a good deal to do.

The general action of a man so engaged - pausing to look over a bundle of papers in his hand, dealing them round in various portions, taking up another bundle and examining its contents with knitted brows and pursed-out lips - dealing, and sorting, and pondering by turns - would easily suggest some whimsical resemblance to a player at cards. The face of Mr Carker the Manager was in good keeping with such a fancy. It was the face of a man who studied his play, warily: who made himself master of all the strong and weak points of the game: who registered the cards in his mind as they fell about him, knew exactly what was on them, what they missed, and what they made: who was crafty to find out what the other players held, and who never betrayed his own hand.

The letters were in various languages, but Mr Carker the Manager read them all. If there had been anything in the offices of Dombey and Son that he could not read, there would have been a card wanting in the pack. He read almost at a glance, and made combinations of one letter with another and one business with another as he went on, adding new matter to the heaps - much as a man would know the cards at sight, and work out their combinations in his mind after they were turned. Something too deep for a partner, and much too deep for an adversary, Mr Carker the Manager sat in the rays of the sun that came down slanting on him through the skylight, playing his game alone.

And although it is not among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe to play at cards, feline from sole to crown was Mr Carker the Manager, as he basked in the strip of summer-light and warmth that shone upon his table and the ground as if they were a crooked



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dial-plate, and himself the only figure on it. With hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feebler than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen: Mr Carker the Manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at a mouse's hole.

Charles Dickens *Dombey and Son* [Ch.22](#)

2024, August 30:

I did not allow my resolution, with respect to the Parliamentary Debates, to cool ... I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence); and plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of distraction. The changes that were rung upon dots, which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else, entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from marks like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in a wrong place; not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep. When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters; the most despotic characters I have ever known; who insisted, for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb, meant expectation, and that a pen-and-ink skyrocket, stood for disadvantageous. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking ...

I resorted to Traddles for advice; who suggested that he should dictate speeches to me, at a pace, and with occasional stoppages, adapted to my weakness ... and night after night, almost every night, for a long time, we had a sort of Private Parliament in Buckingham Street, after I came home from the Doctor's. I should like to see such a Parliament anywhere else! My aunt and Mr. Dick represented the Government or the Opposition (as the case might be), and Traddles, with the assistance of Enfield's Speakers, or a volume of parliamentary orations, thundered astonishing invectives against them. Standing by the table, with his finger in the page to keep the place, and his right arm flourishing above his head, Traddles, as Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Burke, Lord Castlereagh, Viscount Sidmouth, or Mr. Canning, would work himself into the most violent heats, and deliver the most withering denunciations of the profligacy and corruption of my aunt and Mr. Dick; while I used to sit, at a little distance, with my notebook on my knee, fagging after him with all my might and main.

The inconsistency and recklessness of Traddles were not to be exceeded by any real politician. He was for any description of policy, in the compass of a week; and nailed all sorts of colours to every denomination of mast. My aunt, looking very like an immovable Chancellor of the Exchequer, would occasionally throw in an interruption or two, as 'Hear!' or 'No!' or 'Oh!' when the text seemed to require it: which was always a signal to Mr. Dick (a perfect country gentleman) to follow lustily with the same cry. But Mr. Dick got taxed with such things in the course of his Parliamentary career, and was made responsible for such awful consequences, that he became uncomfortable in his mind sometimes. I believe he actually began to be afraid he really had been doing something, tending to the annihilation of the British constitution, and the ruin of the country ...

Charles Dickens *David Copperfield* [Ch.XXXVIII](#)

Note: ... Dickens was a law clerk. His duties included keeping the petty cash fund, delivering documents, running errands and other sundry tasks ... His next job was as a court



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stenographer. To qualify for that position Dickens had to learn the Gurney system of shorthand writing. It took most people about three years to master the system. Dickens, no doubt aided by his excellent memory, learned it in about three months. Consequently in 1829 he began work as a freelance court stenographer ... Dickens became known for his quick and accurate courtroom reporting.



David Copperfield



Mr. Boffin

2024, September 22:

... Mr Boffin's face denoted Care and Complication. Many disordered papers were before him, and he looked at them about as hopefully as an innocent civilian might look at a crowd of troops whom he was required at five minutes' notice to manoeuvre and review ... Mr Boffin was in such severe literary difficulties that his eyes were prominent and fixed, and his breathing was stertorous, when, to the great relief of Mrs Boffin, who observed these symptoms with alarm, the yard bell rang ... Mr Boffin drew a long breath, laid down his pen, looked at his notes as doubting whether he had the pleasure of their acquaintance, and appeared, on a second perusal of their countenances, to be confirmed in his impression that he had not, when there was announced by the hammer-headed young man: 'Mr Rokesmith.'

...

'Sit down, sir,' said Mr Boffin, shaking hands with him. 'Let me see then ... It was Secretary that you named; wasn't it? ... It rather puzzled me at the time ... because (not to make a mystery of our belief) we have always believed a Secretary to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it. Now, you won't think I take a liberty when I mention that you certainly ain't THAT.' ...

Mr Rokesmith again explained; defining the duties he sought to undertake, as those of general superintendent, or manager, or overlooker, or man of business ... 'I would keep exact accounts of all the expenditure you sanctioned, Mr Boffin. I would write your letters, under your direction. I would transact your business with people in your pay or employment. I would,' with a glance and a half-smile at the table, 'arrange your papers-- And so arrange them as to have them always in order for immediate reference, with a note of the contents of each outside it.' ... Relinquishing his hat and gloves, Mr Rokesmith sat down quietly at the table, arranged the open papers into an orderly heap, cast his eyes over each in succession, folded it, docketed it on the outside, laid it in a second heap, and, when that second heap was complete and the first gone, took from his pocket a piece of string and tied it together with a remarkably dexterous hand at a running curve and a loop.

'Good!' said Mr Boffin. 'Very good! Now let us hear what they're all about; will you be so good?' John Rokesmith read his abstracts aloud ... 'Apple-pie order!' said Mr Boffin,



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after checking off each inscription with his hand, like a man beating time. *'And whatever you do with your ink, I can't think, for you're as clean as a whistle after it ...'*

Charles Dickens [Our Mutual Friend](#) Ch.15

Alan Ventress: Thanks for your Dickens excerpts - they are always a pleasure to read.

Thanks Alan. You may have guessed that I am spending as much of my twilight years re-reading as much of Dickens as I can. And I'm doing it the way it should be done. Having a general familiarity with the plots (such as they are) I can do as the Victorians did - just take a volume from the shelf and open it anywhere at random. You come across old familiar passages and experience the joy of ones you had completely forgotten about. And such pleasures have to be shared.

If I were still teaching, that is how I would try to teach the classics to a generation that disdains joined up prose: give them an outline and invite them to jump around and dwell on episodes, the same way they explore the Internet. Poetry (even Milton and Dryden) was always done that way.

And it is surprising how much r/keeping there is to be found in Dickens..

2024, September 23:

<<If I were still teaching, that is how I would try to teach the classics to a generation that disdains joined up prose>>

Silly thing to say, really. These days, I don't suppose they teach the Classics much, any more than Greek or Latin. When I was last in a classroom (over 50 years ago) it was *Day of the Triffids* rather than *David Copperfield*. Nothing against John Wyndham.

2024, September 24:

<< These days, I don't suppose they teach the Classics much, any more than Greek or Latin>>

I meant this, of course, to imply pedagogical indifference towards the great tradition of English Lit. According to an [opinion piece](#) in *The Conversation* in January 2023, however, I'm wrong to be pessimistic; it's a hot topic:

Debates about what books students should be reading in high school reach a crescendo at the start of each school year ...

Everyone has an opinion

... [Some] parents [thought] an all-classics diet threatened to turn teens off reading, and called for older texts to be replaced with contemporary ones that reflected teen lives. Some raised the diversity problem of the so-called – mainly white male – “canon”. And others called for a blend of classic and contemporary books, to tick all the boxes. But everyone had an opinion ...

Diversity backlash

These anxieties have not been helped by political leaders who capitalise on the opportunity to politicise the school curriculum for the purposes of leveraging their opponents and stoking their bases ...

What are they reading at school?

Concerningly, no research has ever been conducted in Australia to collect reliable data about what a typical high-school reading list contains. This means almost all of the discussion about the content of teen reading in schools is based on observations, anecdotes and presumptions ... The [Australian Curriculum](#), along with the various state iterations of that guiding document, makes suggestions about the types of literature students should be exposed to: classic and contemporary world literature ... And about the forms literature should take: novels, poetry, short stories and plays; fiction for young adults and children, multimodal texts such as film, and a variety of nonfiction. However, specific titles are not identified in these documents ... recent research suggests “traditional” literary texts remain



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the bedrock of senior school reading ... Almost 10% of all texts listed are from the writing of William Shakespeare, John Donne, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Dickens, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, and Ernest Hemingway ... It appears those lamenting the death of the classics have nothing to fear ...

Why does it matter?

... Schools have a powerful role: consecrating some stories and knowledges at the expense of others ... Since we cannot fit the entire world into the classroom, we must use the curriculum to select which forms of life to represent. Discrimination is inevitable and always political ... Australian schools have been lucky to avoid the waves of book-banning spreading the US ...

It's not what they read, it's how they read

... The conflation of literature and literacy has meant the content of school reading has contributed to an ignorance, at least outside school staff rooms and teacher training courses, of the importance of reading pedagogies: the methods of instruction teachers use when modelling and supporting reading at school ... The many reading approaches a teacher can deploy makes it difficult for parents or politicians to judge the validity of a particular text selected for study. These approaches might include, for example, reading for [pleasure](#), reading to explore identity and questions of [belonging and alienation](#), or reading (and writing) to understand [social media](#) and the explosion of digital culture ...

Trust teachers

We must be honest with each other and recognise we don't really know whether reading literature makes us better people ... For now, we must put our faith in English teachers. We must trust them – without interference – to select texts for our teens. They know how literature can support the learning needs of their students better than anyone else. And they have spent their entire working lives specialising in the craft of teaching and supporting reading.

The ALA's [List](#) of “challenged” books for the last decade (2010-2019) based on “reports from libraries, schools, and the media on attempts to ban books in communities across the country” derives, however, from a different perspective: the USA's frenzied ideological obsessions. Not one of the 100 titles is a book by Dickens (a serious underestimate of his subversive power). A list of books [recommended by Good Reads](#) for high school students has many of the same titles as those on the ALA List of “challenged” books and, happily, includes some Dickens (*A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*).

It may be a saving grace that neither the professionals nor the book-banners seem capable of truly understanding that it is the spirit of the work rather than its substance, its effect rather than its purpose, that makes a good book worth reading:

“I read Dickens and Shakespear without shame or stint; but their pregnant observations and demonstrations of life are not co-ordinated into any philosophy or religion ... Both have the specific genius of the fictionist and the common sympathies of human feeling and thought in pre-eminent degree. They are often saner and shrewder than the philosophers ... They clear away vast masses of oppressive gravity by their sense of the ridiculous, which is at bottom a combination of sound moral judgment with lighthearted good humor ... they are so irreligious that they exploit popular religion for professional purposes without delicacy or scruple ... they are anarchical ... they have no constructive ideas: they regard those who have them as dangerous fanatics ...” [George Bernard Shaw](#)

Dickens attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached. Yet he managed to do it without making himself hated, and, more than this, the very people he attacked have swallowed him so completely that he has become a national institution himself. In its attitude towards Dickens the English public has always been a little like the elephant which feels a blow with a walking-stick as a delightful tickling ... Whatever else Dickens may have been, he was not a hole-and-corner soul-saver, the kind of well-meaning idiot who thinks that the world will be perfect if you amend a few bylaws and abolish a few anomalies ... The truth is that Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral ... He attacks the law, parliamentary government, the educational system and so forth, without ever clearly suggesting what he would put in their places ... Dickens's attitude is at



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bottom not even *destructive*. There is no clear sign that he wants the existing order to be overthrown, or that he believes it would make very much difference if it *were* overthrown. For in reality his target is not so much society as 'human nature' ... [George Orwell](#)

Asking kids to believe that a good book isn't to be read because it's worthy, or virtuous, or improving, or any of that crap but because it's *gonna knock your socks off* may be a start.

2024, September 26:

**<< Asking kids to believe that a good book isn't to be read
because it's worthy, or virtuous, or improving, or any of that crap
but because it's *gonna knock your socks off* may be a start>>**

"The house in Thavies' Inn had bills in the windows announcing that it was to let, and it looked dirtier and gloomier and ghastlier than ever. The name of poor Mr Jellyby had appeared in the list of Bankrupts, but a day or two before; and he was shut up in the dining-room with two gentlemen, and a heap of blue bags, account-books, and papers, making the most desperate endeavours to understand his affairs. They appeared to me to be quite beyond his comprehension; for when Caddy took me into the dining-room by mistake, and we came upon Mr Jellyby in his spectacles, forlornly fenced into a corner by the great dining-table and the two gentlemen, he seemed to have given up the whole thing, and to be speechless and insensible.

"Going upstairs to Mrs Jellyby's room (the children were all screaming in the kitchen, and there was no servant to be seen), we found that lady in the midst of a voluminous correspondence, opening, reading, and sorting letters, with a great accumulation of torn covers on the floor. She was so pre-occupied that at first she did not know me, though she sat looking at me with that curious, bright-eyed, far-off look of hers. *Ah! Miss Summerson!* she said at last. *I was thinking of something so different! I hope you are well. I am happy to see you. Mr Jarndyce and Miss Clare quite well?* I hoped in return that Mr Jellyby was quite well.

"*Why, not quite, my dear,* said Mrs Jellyby, in the calmest manner. *He has been unfortunate in his affairs, and is a little out of spirits. Happily for me, I am so much engaged that I have no time to think about it. We have, at the present moment, one hundred and seventy families, Miss Summerson, averaging five persons in each, either gone or going to the left bank of the Niger.* I thought of the one family so near us, who were neither gone nor going to the left bank of the Niger, and wondered how she could be so placid ...

"... finally we went down-stairs into the damp dark kitchen, where Peepy and his little brothers and sisters were grovelling on the stone floor, and where we had such a game of play with them, that to prevent myself from being quite torn to pieces I was obliged to fall back on my fairy tales. From time to time, I heard loud voices in the parlour over-head; and occasionally a violent tumbling about of the furniture. The last effect I am afraid was caused by poor Mr Jellyby's breaking away from the dining-table and making rushes at the window with the intention of throwing himself into the area, whenever he made any new attempt to understand his affairs."

Charles Dickens [Bleak House](#) Ch.23.

Dickens had a powerful [social conscience](#) but he took a sardonic view of the Virtuous:

"...They seemed to our poor wits, and according to their own accounts, to be constantly polling people by tens of thousands, yet never bringing their candidates in for anything. It made our heads ache to think, on the whole, what feverish lives they must lead. Among the ladies who were most distinguished for this rapacious benevolence (if I may use the expression) was a Mrs. Pardiggle ... Mr. Jarndyce ... remarked that there were two classes of charitable people; one, the people who did a little and made a great deal of noise; the other, the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all. We were therefore



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curious to see Mrs. Pardiggle, suspecting her to be a type of the former class, and were glad when she called one day with her five young sons.

These, young ladies, said Mrs. Pardiggle with great volubility after the first salutations, are my five boys ... We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazened and shrivelled -- though they were that too -- but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent ... At the mention of the Tockahoopo Indians, I could really have supposed Eghbert to be one of the most baleful members of that tribe, he gave me such a savage frown. The face of each child, as the amount of his contribution was mentioned, darkened in a peculiarly vindictive manner, but his was by far the worst. I must except, however, the little recruit into the Infant Bonds of Joy, who was stolidly and evenly miserable ... I do not go with Mrs. Jellyby in all things. I do not go with Mrs. Jellyby in her treatment of her young family. It has been noticed. It has been observed that her young family are excluded from participation in the objects to which she is devoted. She may be right, she may be wrong; but, right or wrong, this is not my course with MY young family. I take them everywhere.

I was afterwards convinced (and so was Ada) that from the ill-conditioned eldest child, these words extorted a sharp yell. He turned it off into a yawn, but it began as a yell ... *My young family are not frivolous; they expend the entire amount of their allowance in subscriptions, under my direction; and they have attended as many public meetings and listened to as many lectures, orations, and discussions as generally fall to the lot of few grown people. Alfred (five), who, as I mentioned, has of his own election joined the Infant Bonds of Joy, was one of the very few children who manifested consciousness on that occasion after a fervid address of two hours from the chairman of the evening. Alfred glowered at us as if he never could, or would, forgive the injury of that night ...*

Charles Dickens, [Bleak House](#), Ch. 8



[Mrs. Jellyby](#)



[Mrs. Pardiggle](#)

The pessimists who attack the Universe are always under this disadvantage. They have an exhilarating consciousness that they could make the sun and moon better; but they also have the depressing consciousness that they could not make the sun and moon at all ... We may disapprove of Mr. Guppy, but we recognise him as a creation flung down like a miracle out of an upper sphere; we can pull him to pieces, but we could not have put him together. We can destroy Mrs. Gamp in our wrath, but we could not have made her in our joy ... One of the godlike things about Dickens is his quantity, his quantity as such, the enormous output, the incredible fecundity of his invention, I have said a moment ago that not one of us could have invented Mr. Guppy. But even if we could have stolen Mr. Guppy from Dickens we have still to confront the fact that Dickens would have been able to invent another quite inconceivable character to take his place. Perhaps we could have created Mr. Guppy; but the effort would certainly have exhausted us; we should be ever afterwards wheeled about in a bath-chair at Bournemouth. G K Chesterton [Charles Dickens](#) Ch.10



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The darkness that lies at the heart of human nature is all around us –

- currently: [Sudan](#), [Gaza](#), [Ukraine](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Myanmar](#), etc. and
- historically: [China](#), [Armenia](#), [Australia](#), [North America](#), [South America](#), [Congo](#), [French Colonial Empire](#), etc.

but a moralistic response is not inconsistent with an understanding of all that because the human spirit, in all its complexity, also encompasses a hunger to be good. Satisfying that hunger in a child begins with *understanding* and understanding must precede action if action is to have any good effect.

PS. Mrs Jellyby is often supposed to be a [caricature](#), in part, of [Caroline Chisholm](#) – the virtuous lady adorning our [\\$5 dollar note](#). Dickens denied it (possibly tongue-in-cheek) and he was, in fact, a supporter of her Family Colonization Loan Society, along with many other “philanthropic” endeavours. Not [causes](#) mind. As George Orwell powerfully argued, Dickens was a moralist, not a revolutionary. There is no evidence of his wanting to change the world in a *systematic* way; he thought that could only be done by bringing us to an *understanding* of justice and to a *hatred* of tyranny, cruelty, and indifference.



[Caroline Chisholm](#)



[George Orwell](#)

2024, September 27:

<<[19 Nov., 2023](#) : They have ... substituted “values” for thought. The record (whether contemporary or historical) will tell its own story and its truth (not our values or those of anyone else) is what the recordkeeper tries to seek out. Our values, such as they are, drive us to that ... Unpredictably, the record may turn out to uphold one “side” or the other. More likely, the record will uphold neither ... And contested interpretation(s) should be about what the record says not about what value proposition it upholds ...>>

<<[26 Sep., 2024](#): ... a moralistic response is not inconsistent with an understanding of all that because the human spirit, in all its complexity, also encompasses a hunger to be good. Satisfying that hunger in a child begins with *understanding* and understanding must precede action if action is to have any good effect>>

How then does all this compute? What kind of values-in-action does understanding lead to? A passion to “fix everything” or to fix something? To overthrow tyranny or just to replace it with a new one? To be [absolute](#) or temperate -

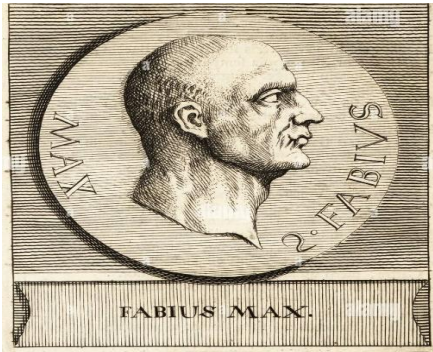
*I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.*

.....
*I must be cruel only to be kind.
Thus bad begins and worse remains behind.”*



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To be [Quintus Fabius Maximus](#) or [Robespierre](#) or, maybe, and this is the danger, just to end up screaming [ire in gehennam](#) into a heartless disarray because we lose the faith that we can [change the world](#)?



Quintus Fabius Maximus



Maximilien Robespierre

Teaching is, of course, grounded in values, values that moderate both the matter to be taught and the manner in which it is taught. Archiving too, one hopes, is so grounded. But heart-felt belief is an obstacle to learning and to discovery. Chesterton and Aquinas would dispute that last statement.

And teaching is unavoidably political, too (as is archiving). The teacher (and, as Acton advises, this applies to archivists and historians also) must temper dogma with doubt and objectivity if developing understanding is not to be stifled. Parents and the Virtuous hate that, so the battle-lines are drawn.

2024, October 13:

<< ... But heart-felt belief is an obstacle to learning and to discovery. Chesterton and Aquinas would dispute that last statement ... The teacher (and, as Acton advises, this applies to archivists and historians also) must temper dogma with doubt and objectivity if developing understanding is not to be stifled ...>>

“When examining evidence relevant to a given belief, people are inclined to see what they expect to see, and conclude what they expect to conclude. Information that is consistent with our pre-existing beliefs is often accepted at face value, whereas evidence that contradicts them is critically scrutinized and discounted. Our beliefs may thus be less responsive than they should be to the implications of new information.”

Thomas Gilovich, [How We Know What Isn't So: the Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life](#) p.50.

Face A/Face B Experiment (Edward Engel)

... an observer was asked to look through a prism stereoscope ... presenting different images simultaneously to the two eyes through two lenses of equal power. One eye saw Face A, the other eye saw Face B, Face B very faintly. At the start, only the lens showing Face A was opened. Then both lenses were opened showing ... Face B very faintly. In successive exposures, Face B increased in brightness until it matched the brightness of Face A. During each exposure, the observer reported seeing Face A. Then the procedure was reversed: Face B was kept at the same level of brightness while Face A was dimmed until only Face B remained. And yet the observer continued to report seeing Face A.

From Brian VanDeMark, [Road to Disaster: A New History of America's Descent into Vietnam](#) (Custom House, 2019), pp.10-11.



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"We don't have twelve years' experience in Vietnam.
We have one year's experience twelve times over."

John Paul Vann

Invisible Gorilla Experiment (Christopher Chabris & Daniel Simons)

... people who are focused on one thing can easily overlook something else. To demonstrate this effect they created a video where students pass a basketball between themselves. Viewers asked to count the number of times the players with the white shirts pass the ball often fail to notice a person in a gorilla suit who appears in the center of the image ...

PS While not completely rubbishing the Invisible Gorilla results, new research modifies the conclusions: "the results showed that participants, while engaged in the pass-counting task, were more likely to spot the NYU gorilla if it was moving substantially faster than in the original 1999 experiment *or* if it was leaping instead of walking".

2024, October 15:

What an archivist CD would have made. The passage below ticks off many of the points in Ted Ling's book.

... I submitted that I thought the Prerogative Office rather a queerly managed institution. Mr. Spenlow inquired in what respect? I replied, with all due deference to his experience (but with more deference, I am afraid, to his being Dora's father), that perhaps it was a little nonsensical that the Registry of that Court, containing the original wills of all persons leaving effects within the immense province of Canterbury, for three whole centuries, should be an accidental building, never designed for the purpose, leased by the registrars for their Own private emolument, unsafe, not even ascertained to be fire-proof, choked with the important documents it held, and positively, from the roof to the basement, a mercenary speculation of the registrars, who took great fees from the public, and crammed the public's wills away anyhow and anywhere, having no other object than to get rid of them cheaply. That, perhaps, it was a little unreasonable that these registrars in the receipt of profits amounting to eight or nine thousand pounds a year (to say nothing of the profits of the deputy registrars, and clerks of seats), should not be obliged to spend a little of that money, in finding a reasonably safe place for the important documents which all classes of people were compelled to hand over to them, whether they would or no. That, perhaps, it was a little unjust, that all the great offices in this great office should be magnificent sinecures, while the unfortunate working-clerks in the cold dark room upstairs were the worst rewarded, and the least considered men, doing important services, in London. That perhaps it was a little indecent that the principal registrar of all, whose duty it was to find the public, constantly resorting to this place, all needful accommodation, should be an enormous sinecurist in virtue of that post (and might be, besides, a clergyman, a pluralist, the holder of a staff in a cathedral, and what not), - while the public was put to the inconvenience of which we had a specimen every afternoon when the office was busy, and which we knew to be quite monstrous. That, perhaps, in short, this Prerogative Office of the diocese of Canterbury was altogether such a pestilent job, and such a pernicious absurdity, that but for its being squeezed away in a corner of St. Paul's Churchyard, which few people knew, it must have been turned completely inside out, and upside down, long ago.

Mr. Spenlow smiled as I became modestly warm on the subject, and then argued this question with me as he had argued the other. He said, what was it after all? It was a question of feeling. If the public felt that their wills were in safe keeping, and took it for granted that the office was not to be made better, who was the worse for it? Nobody. Who was the better for it? All the Sinecurists. Very well. Then the good predominated. It might not be a perfect system; nothing was perfect; but what he objected to, was, the insertion of the wedge. Under the Prerogative Office, the country had been glorious. Insert the wedge into the Prerogative Office, and the country would cease to be glorious. He considered it the principle of a gentleman to take things as he found them; and he had no doubt the Prerogative Office would last our time. I deferred to his opinion, though I had great doubts of it myself. I find he was right, however; for it has not only lasted to the present moment, but has done so in the teeth



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of a great parliamentary report made (not too willingly) eighteen years ago, when all these objections of mine were set forth in detail, and when the existing stowage for wills was described as equal to the accumulation of only two years and a half more. What they have done with them since; whether they have lost many, or whether they sell any, now and then, to the butter shops; I don't know. I am glad mine is not there, and I hope it may not go there, yet awhile.

Charles Dickens [David Copperfield](#) Ch. XXXIII

PS. How true to nature, even in their most trivial details, almost every character and every incident in the works ... really were ... but none, except medical men, can judge of the rare fidelity with which he followed ... the devious paths of disease and death ...the physician [is] often tempted to say, “*What a gain it would have been to physic if one so keen to observe and so facile to describe had devoted his powers to the medical art*” (*British Medical Journal*). Norrie Epstein [The Friendly Dickens](#) (Viking, 1998) p.2

<<[Alan Ventress: A most enjoyable passage. I have started reading Little Dorrit after one of your previous CD posts.](#)>>

In one reviewer's opinion, it is an [unforgiving critique](#) of capitalism and is all about money, debt and bankruptcy ... George Bernard Shaw declared it “a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*” but then he also declared Joe Stalin's Russia to be a workers' paradise, so what the hell.

In Iris Murdoch's *Nuns and Soldiers*, a character [reports](#) “[I]t was amazing, it was so crammed and chaotic, and yet so touching, a kind of miracle, a strangely naked display of feeling, and full of profound ideas, yet one felt it was all true!”

2024, November 2:

Tellson's Bank by Temple Bar was ... very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious. It was an old-fashioned place, moreover, in the moral attribute that the partners in the House were proud of its smallness, proud of its darkness, proud of its ugliness, proud of its incommodiousness ... Tellson's (they said) wanted no elbow-room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might, or Snooks Brothers' might; but Tellson's, thank Heaven—! Any one of these partners would have disinherited his son on the question of rebuilding Tellson's ...

Thus it had come to pass, that Tellson's was the triumphant perfection of inconvenience ... you fell into Tellson's down two steps, and came to your senses in a miserable little shop, with two little counters, where the oldest of men made your cheque shake as if the wind rustled it, while they examined the signature by the dingiest of windows ... If your business necessitated your seeing “the House,” you were put into a species of Condemned Hold at the back, where you meditated on a misspent life, until the House came with its hands in its pockets, and you could hardly blink at it in the dismal twilight ... Your deeds got into extemporised strong-rooms made of kitchens and sculleries, and fretted all the fat out of their parchments into the banking-house air. Your lighter boxes of family papers went up-stairs into a Barmecide room, that always had a great dining-table in it and never had a dinner, and where ... the first letters written to you by your old love, or by your little children, were but newly released from the horror of being ogled through the windows, by the heads exposed on Temple Bar with an insensate brutality and ferocity worthy of Abyssinia or Ashantee ...

Cramped in all kinds of dim cupboards and hutches at Tellson's, the oldest of men carried on the business gravely. When they took a young man into Tellson's London house, they hid him somewhere till he was old. They kept him in a dark place, like a cheese, until he had the full Tellson flavour and blue-mould upon him. Then only was he permitted to be seen, spectacularly poring over large books, and casting his breeches and gaiters into the general weight of the establishment.

Charles Dickens [A Tale of Two Cities](#) Book the Second, Ch.1



2024, November 11:

Judith Flanders [*A Place for Everything: The Curious History of Alphabetical Order*](#) (2021)

I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last
(Book of Revelation)

Of all the methods that have been explored – hierarchical, categorical, geographical, chronological, alphabetical – we might say that alphabetical is as close as we can get to a universally accessible, non-elitist form of sorting, and therefore it is the worst form of classification and organization that has ever been devised, except for all those other forms that have been tried. (p.262)

I can't make out the sense of "therefore" in the above sentence. It's a clever turn on a Churchill aphorism about democracy but is it logical? Is it even true? This book is about classification and organization (viz. structures). On the face of it, things r/keepers should be interested in. But the book is primarily about utility whereas the first concern of archivists is identifying (and preserving in some sense or another) the original order, the order resulting from the process of formation, regardless of whether or not it is universally accessible and non-elitist in the belief that "creation" reflects a purpose, that "sorting" data in particular ways confers meaning. But we have learned that "order" involves something beyond originality.

Long ago, it was argued that where the records-maker had no such purpose, or at least one that was not discernible, there was no meaning to be had and [argued in reply](#) that original order demonstrated (at least) the last practical use made and, to eyes other than our own, might even provide meanings we were too obtuse to discover. More recently, search engines designed to "*discover, crawl, transform, and store information for retrieval and presentation in response to user queries*" across one **or more** computer systems, have (it might be argued) made the organisation for storage a matter of purely technical convenience. In other words, the sorting doesn't occur until the data is used. Flanders has something to say about "search tools":

The notion that the world was a circle of perfection, created by an omnipotent and perfect God, now increasingly came into conflict with the need for search tools, the desire to break manuscripts ... into smaller elements that could be manipulated to make it easier to locate specific sections, or passages, or even single words. Just as it is difficult for us today to remember that before print, every copy of a single work might be different, so too it is difficult to comprehend that before print, readers saw manuscripts as things that could be endlessly revised and renewed. It was only with the arrival of printed books that the concept of a work that was finished, fixed, came to be. Previously, manuscripts from antiquity onwards commonly contained wide margins to allow for the inclusion of expensive illuminations and decoration, but more frequently for the addition of annotations and amendments (pp. 76-77)

For archivists, of course, the idea that the record is "[always becoming](#)", is never "fixed", remains powerful.

Flanders's book is a useful account of the history of "sorting" and therefore of considerable interest to us. And it has quite a lot in it about archives and r/keeping. But it is fairly innocent of the r/keeper's understanding of structure – so much more than facilitating discovery. And, when it comes to discovery, while we applaud "universal" and "non-elitist" forms, we think (or ought to think) that understanding (which is our way of knowing) involves more than that:

Respect for Facts ("[mere facts](#)") would appear to be a hallmark of [archival thinking](#) but it is understanding we really need ... Dickens was [not against factual knowledge](#) but rather "*against statistics as a form of social knowledge, a way of knowing which necessarily constitutes the object of its knowledge ... in particular ways and which thereby dictates particular approaches to it. It is statistics as what Michel Foucault would*



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call a disciplinary technology of knowledge, as a mechanism for moral and political surveillance and restraint."

I do not think it fanciful to liken this to our corrective idea that evidence and interpretation cannot easily be separated and that objective Truth can be abused. Indeed, that idea has become common place. In none of his books does Dickens look to Dogma, Institutions, or Systems for an answer. Not only are factories and trade unions portrayed as instruments of oppression but also [workhouses](#), [schools](#), [the law](#), [bureaucracy](#), [mobs](#), the [weight of evidence](#), [creeds](#), [theories](#), "[smelly little orthodoxies](#)", [families](#) even. The corrective lies not in an orthodoxy of our own but in diversity rather than homogenisation and that is where we too must find it, even if the orthodox hate us for it.

In simple terms, that means our view of the case must self-consciously encompass the multiplicity of change and perspective. The whole purpose of archival description is to make the facts being observed submit to an understanding of their meaning – a true understanding but one which may involve dissonance or contestation (the "[Grey Zone](#)"). The Grey Zone is [not a comfortable place](#) – disinformation and deception abound alongside the dialectic. Dogmatists want us to take sides [but] The phenomena we describe (the entities) are not self-explanatory and how we portray and juxtapose them either illuminates or obscures their meaning (sometimes both) – never more so than when we show them standing in relationships with each other.

Scaleability

PS Pleasingly, Flanders also deals with common-place books.

2024, December 6:

... To readers and writers of an alphabetic language ... the assumption ... that the elements that make up a writing system ... must be sorted or organized in some way – is ... unquestioned ... Ordering and sorting ... have become so integral to the modern Western mindset that their significance is curiously invisible ... alphabetical order, we assume, is and always has been humanity's default sorting method ... [but] A range of other sorting methods – geographical, chronological, hierarchical, categorical – were favoured over alphabetical order for centuries ... in a world more stratified than our own, sorting things hierarchically was once a natural impulse ... the history of how we moved from the arrival of the alphabet around 2000 BCE is filled with ... surprises and wonders ... This magical tool, the alphabet, bestows the ability to create order out of centuries of thought, of knowledge, of literature, of scientific discovery and history ...

Judith Flanders, [A Place for Everything: The Curious History of Alphabetical Order](#) (Preface)

<< More recently, search engines designed to “discover, crawl, transform, and store information for retrieval and presentation in response to user queries” across one or more computer systems, have (it might be argued) made the organisation for storage a matter of purely technical convenience. In other words, the sorting doesn’t occur until the data is used.>>

The idea that data is just an inert, unprocessed, unorganised lump – just sitting there waiting for a search engine to go to work on it – is, of course, naive. The “sorting” of the data into a result that responds to searching is pre-ordained by the descriptions (e.g. metadata) made when the data is formulated and by the algorithms that control the presentation of results. It is a fiction to suppose that the ordering of results is any more random than that imposed by the surprises and wonders of Flanders’ magical tool. The most that can be said is that online searching affords the ability to move about more easily, to reorganise the results more flexibly, and to interpose some requirements the compiler didn’t have in mind. For a descriptive archivist, wanting to be transparent, the idea that his hand is a hidden one (except to perceptive eyes like those of [timsherratt.au](#)) an alarming one.

Whosoever had gone out of Fleet Street into the Temple at the date of this history, and had wandered disconsolate about the Temple until he stumbled on a dismal churchyard, and had looked up at the dismal windows commanding that churchyard until at the most



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dismal window of them all he saw a dismal boy, would in him have beheld, at one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk, of Mr Mortimer Lightwood, erewhile called in the newspapers eminent solicitor.

... To the second floor on which the window was situated, [Mr Boffin] ascended ... *'Morning, morning, morning!'* said Mr Boffin, with a wave of his hand, as the office door was opened by the dismal boy, whose appropriate name was Blight. *'Governor in?'* ... *'Mr Lightwood ain't in at the present moment, but I expect him back very shortly. Would you take a seat in Mr Lightwood's room, sir, while I look over our Appointment Book?'* Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long thin manuscript volume with a brown paper cover, and running his finger down the day's appointments, murmuring, *'Mr Aggs, Mr Baggs, Mr Caggs, Mr Daggs, Mr Faggs, Mr Gaggs, Mr Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr Lightwood will be in directly ... I'll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Callers' Book for the day.'* Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, *'Mr Alley, Mr Balley, Mr Calley, Mr Dalley, Mr Falley, Mr Galley, Mr Halley, Mr Lalley, Mr Malley. And Mr Boffin.'*

'Strict system here; eh, my lad?' said Mr Boffin, as he was booked. *'Yes, sir,'* returned the boy. *'I couldn't get on without it.'* By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

'How long have you been in the law, now?' asked Mr Boffin, with a pounce, in his usual inquisitive way. *'I've been in the law, now, sir, about three years.'* *'Must have been as good as born in it!'* said Mr Boffin, with admiration. *'Do you like it?'* *'I don't mind it much,'* returned Young Blight, heaving a sigh, as if its bitterness were past ... *'About how long might it take you now, at a average rate of going, to be a Judge?'* asked Mr Boffin, after surveying his small stature in silence ... The boy virtually replied that as he had the honour to be a Briton who never never never, there was nothing to prevent his going in for it. Yet he seemed inclined to suspect that there might be something to prevent his coming out with it.

... Then Mr Boffin, with his stick at his ear, like a Familiar Spirit explaining the office to him, sat staring at a little bookcase of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad—all very dusty—and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly-disguised gun-case pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labelled *HARMON ESTATE*, until Mr Lightwood appeared ...

Charles Dickens, [*Our Mutual Friend*](#) Ch.8

2024, December 20:

The offices of Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs stood convenient with an open door, down two smooth steps in the market-place: so that any angry farmer inclining towards hot water, might tumble into it at once. Their special council-chamber and hall of conference was an old back room up-stairs, with a low dark ceiling, which seemed to be knitting its brows gloomily in the consideration of tangled points of law. It was furnished with some high-backed leathern chairs, garnished with great goggle-eyed brass nails, of which, every here and there, two or three had fallen out; or had been picked out, perhaps, by the wandering thumbs and forefingers of bewildered clients. There was a framed print of a great judge in it, every curl in whose dreadful wig had made a man's hair stand on end. Bales of papers filled the dusty closets, shelves, and tables; and round the wainscoat there were tiers of boxes, padlocked and fireproof, with people's names painted outside, which anxious visitors felt themselves, by a cruel enchantment, obliged to spell backwards and forwards, and to make anagrams of, while they sat, seeming to listen to Snitchey and Craggs, without comprehending one word of what they said ...



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... Here sometimes they would linger, of a fine evening, at the window of their council-chamber, overlooking the old battle-ground, and wonder (but that was generally at assize time, when much business had made them sentimental) at the folly of mankind, who couldn't always be at peace with one another, and go to law comfortably. Here days, and weeks, and months, and years, passed over them; their calendar, the gradually diminishing number of brass nails in the leathern chairs, and the increasing bulk of papers on the tables ... Messrs. Snitchey and Craggs sat opposite each other at a neighbouring desk. One of the fire-proof boxes, unpadlocked and opened, was upon it; a part of its contents lay strewn upon the table, and the rest was then in course of passing through the hands of Mr. Snitchey, who brought it to the candle, document by document, looked at every paper singly, as he produced it, shook his head, and handed it to Mr. Craggs, who looked it over also, shook his head, and laid it down. Sometimes they would stop, and shaking their heads in concert, look towards the abstracted client; and the name on the box being Michael Warden, Esquire, we may conclude from these premises that the name and the box were both his, and that the affairs of Michael Warden, Esquire, were in a bad way.

Charles Dickens [*The Battle of Life: A Love Story*](#) (Part the Second) – Dedication: *This Christmas Book is Cordially Inscribed to My English Friends in Switzerland*

