

# 2019 MARGARET JENNINGS AWARD PROFILE

## KARA WILLIAMS - CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

### Tell us how you first got involved in the archival profession?



I began my archives journey by enrolling in Charles Sturt University's Bachelor of Information Studies in 2011. Probably not the most orthodox pathway into the profession, I was a senior member of the Royal Australian Navy Band, and had been a professional musician, music instructor, and music-related administrator my entire working life. I wanted to extend myself through further study, but it needed to be flexible enough to accommodate sometimes disruptive Defence Force requirements. I think more-so, I thought the role of an archivist had synergy with my interests and personality (I am an INFJ for any Myers-Briggs fans). It soon became evident my work and interests were supporting and informing my studies rather than the course informing my ADF career. It sounds a much easier transition than it was, but I left the ADF into a full-time collection manager role (in a museum) one month prior to finishing my degree.

Being physically involved in professional activities has been fairly challenging for me. Among other significant life events impacting my studies and industry employment since I started my degree in 2011, I have now moved house 6 times across 3 different states; also residing where local archive-related work and professional development opportunities are comparatively limited. This has required resourcefulness in seeking, identifying, and seizing opportunities. Currently, to continue developing my industry skills, knowledge, and networks between employment, I am volunteering at my local regional archives.

### What has surprised you most about the profession?

Information professionals often go unnoticed by the general population. I had the honour to address a new intake of Charles Sturt University Bachelor of Information Studies students at their initial residential school as a key note speaker in early February this year. I jokingly described information professionals as professional infiltrators! My understanding of what archivists did before I started my studies was probably like most of the population: very limited. The more I am involved in the sector, the more I am surprised at the diversity of professional activities and roles. It is now a fun challenge for me to try and explain to people what I do in one (short) sentence and have them not look puzzled!

### What would you tell someone who is thinking about studying in the area?

As a recent graduate, I had many 'words of wisdom' for the new CSU students! These were primarily strategies to mitigate challenges when studying part time in distance mode over many years, but I also explained that although I achieved excellent grades in my studies, grades were not my focus. I just wanted to learn each topic as best as I could, because every subject was preparing me for professional practice and inquiry, and I wanted to be an effective archivist.

I also explained a defining moment in my thinking occurred at a professional development session. The topic was the importance of identifying professional and broader transferrable skills for increased employment opportunities. The work and roles I have undertaken to date have been quite diverse. There were aspects of my Defence, music, teaching, *and* archives skills, knowledge,

and networks I was able to draw on and apply to different contexts. Just because you currently do one thing doesn't mean you can't be good (or great!) at something else, and just because you don't quite fit an advertised job role doesn't mean you aren't the best candidate. General skills and knowledge, and an ability to learn and adapt may be exactly what an employer is looking for. However, in life, you are not often handed something for free, so be proactive and create opportunities for yourself.

### **What do you think will change within the sector over the next five years?**

Gosh. What a question! I am not sure I have anything ground-breaking to add to current sector dialogue! The work I have been involved in so far has been fundamentally about creating better access to collections online. There is no escaping the challenges of creating and managing digital collections. The research project I have just finished investigated new uses for non-traditional university records that would ordinarily be destroyed under RDAs, and I can see awareness of the value of this type of record increasing. I think the GLAM sector as a whole will continue to reimagine how to engage people in collections—not only as users, but as hands-on contributors to content and context description, drawing on contemporary technologies for inspiration.

### **What would you like to be doing in five years' time?**

I have been energised by a few concepts arising from my last project, and I would like to investigate and report on those over the coming years; however, I couldn't even begin to guess what I will be doing in five years' time. If someone had told me five years ago what I'd be doing now, I would have laughed at them disbelievingly! So, I will be very interested to discover what I will be doing in five years' time myself!