

2019 MARGARET JENNINGS AWARD PROFILE

RENATA WARE - UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

What has surprised you most about the profession?



Activist archivists! Bringing back the voices of marginalised and minimised/invisible communities helps to rebalance viewpoints and provide some redress to historic wrongs. I did a research project with Michaela Hart of the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services, where we focused on creating principles for ethical stakeholder engagement, particularly those stakeholders for whom their personal records are a source of pain or shame or bad memories. Michaela really opened my eyes to how partial and partisan record creation can be and helped me to establish how important a sense of empathy can be in archival practice.

If you could change one thing about archival practice, what would it be?

As I mentioned before, I think that a sense of empathy is key. I also think it's important to start embedding basic archival practices across more workplaces. Having spent some time working in university administration, I've seen poor practices because people don't know or don't think to archive documents (especially emails!). For example, important documents saved on personal drives are lost when someone leaves the institution, or documents are left in the bottom desk drawer when someone moves office. If we teach and embed archival practices earlier, the archival process can be improved.

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

I'd say that information management as a wider field has applications across many industries and fields, and many businesses have archives that need careful management. I would also advise them to look for opportunities to connect. I chose to volunteer at State Library Victoria because I wanted to give back to my community and I thought it would be an interesting place to work, but I have learned so much from so many incredible and skilled people who have become friends. I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to make those connections that have enriched my life.

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

I would love to be working in an archive with a team of passionate people, somewhere like a university or GLAM institution. I enjoy working with people and teaching them how to research, and I love everyday objects with stories attached (like on 'Antiques Roadshow!'), so the idea of telling stories and making materials and objects available for people to explore through digitisation and cataloguing really appeals to me. Having any opportunity to visit schools to talk about historical objects would be pretty great too!