

Sharman Award report

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As announced previously in *Archive Matters* (Issue 75, 7 August 2017) and again during this year's Annual General Meeting, I was fortunate enough to receive the Sharman Award for 2017. I would like to thank the ASA Council for providing me with the assistance to attend this year's annual conference in Melbourne. As was kindly reminded by Julia Mant at the AGM, I now have the duty of providing a report on my experiences associated with the conference!

Diverse Worlds was the theme of this year's conference, taking place from 25 to 28 September at the University of Melbourne. Having previously worked with archival records relating to migrants and people of indigenous backgrounds, I was curious about the ideas that would arise during the week. The role of archival collections in a pluralistic society deserves our attention for the impact they can have on social constructs. This, with disadvantage and injustice evident in numerous aspects of Australian society, had me attuned before the week started.

The conference featured various discussions on the status and function of archives for groups which have experienced bias – notably, people with Australian indigenous backgrounds, women, and people who identify themselves as LGBTIQ. The situation of disadvantage in connection with archives in various overseas contexts was also discussed.

Verne Harris, Director of Research and Archive at the Nelson Mandela Foundation set the tone with the first keynote lecture. The power of 'whiteness' was brought to light with consideration of the current situation in South Africa, described by Verne as now the most unequal society on earth. Regrettably, Harris described the archival profession in South Africa as conservative and resistant to change. Harris noted that the dialogue of equality in South Africa is dependent on archive, and emphasised this through example – notable to my mind, the Gupta leaks which revealed exploitation by politicians.

Various archival institutions, individuals and projects were featured throughout the two days of sessions. I was able to listen to a couple of the University of Melbourne Archives' (UMA) presentations which addressed their collection management as well as focusing specifically on their LGBTIQ histories. The story of the Victorian Women's Liberation and Feminist Archive as told by Jean Taylor was also an inspiring tell of a grassroots development of an archive capturing part of our social history. I was also particularly impressed with the work presented by the University of Newcastle on engaging tertiary students with their GLAMx Living Histories Digitisation Lab.

Jarrett Drake, an advisory archivist for A People's Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland, was tasked with providing the second keynote (and closing) lecture. Drake was admirable in the delivery of his lecture, kneeling on one knee for its entire duration as an act of protest against the ongoing suffering of African Americans. Drake talked about his 'break up' with the archival profession and addressed the question of how if at all diversity dismantles the white supremacy of archives. Discarding the neo-liberal discourse around diversity and adopting an 'archive of the oppressed' was

Drake's proposed approach to this. Drake's talk included his account of his involvement in setting up the Society of American Archivists' first liberated archive forum.

In essence, I felt that *Diverse Worlds* was about the balance of power in archives – the thought of which leaving me fondly reminiscent of my reading into the philosopher Foucault some years ago. The pervasiveness of power, or lack thereof, through the use of archives was clearly on show through the presentations provided by Harris, Drake and others throughout *Diverse Worlds*. To also take on board, however, was the idea that people of indigenous backgrounds create and manage knowledge differently to Western archives – something unquestionably deserving of my attention as I continue working with collections. As happens to be the case, I still handle records relating to indigenous people as part of my current work at Lutheran Archives and must consider how their arrangement, context and accessibility can be better managed.

In addition to the conference, I also took the opportunity to attend a couple workshops and the visit to the Geelong Library and Heritage Centre, all organised by the Victorian Branch of the ASA. The visit to Geelong, which preceded the conference, was an ideal opportunity to tour the much acclaimed facility under the guidance of its manager, Mark Beasley. While the building as a whole was remarkable for its attention to design, the archival facilities – epitomised by a 'wow oh wow' red reading room – were especially awe-inspiring.

Lastly, I wish to say a word of thanks to everyone who worked to put together such an interesting week!