

Samara McIlroy: Sharman Award Report

ASA Annual Conference, Here We Are, 17-20 October 2022, held on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal/Canberra and online

In early 2020 Tasmania closed its borders, only allowing travellers in at the end of 2021. Opportunities to travel outside of Tasmania during COVID were limited, and after such a long period of professional isolation, I felt that attending the Australia Society of Archivists (ASA) Annual Conference in Canberra would be an amazing opportunity to reset, learn new things and take advantage of peer networking and the energy of attending in person.

The Sharman Award paid for my conference registration, return airfare from Devonport to Canberra, and conference accommodation. This was my fifth ASA Conference, and my first ever hybrid conference experience.

The 2022 Annual General Meeting was held at the National Press Club, and was attended by a mix of in-person and virtual members. Quite a thrill to be meeting at such an iconic Canberra venue. We were delighted to hear that membership fees would remain the same for 2023, Nicola Laurent would back up her first successful term as President with an encore, and that *Keeping Archives* would be refreshed and published as a new edition. A reminder that the ASA truly punches above its weight.

The Awards were presented with pizzazz and ended with an edge of the seat, nail biting thriller of an entrance from Rose Barrowcliffe, recipient of the 2022 Sigrid McCausland Emerging Writers Award, for *'Closing the narrative gap: social media as a tool to reconcile institutional archival narratives with Indigenous counter-narratives'* from *A&M Vol 49(3), 2021*.

The last event of the evening was the Welcome Reception. This was a fantastic way to meet and greet fellow conference attendees amidst the bling of the Press Club decor.

Day one of the conference began with a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country held on a grassy strip dividing the lanes of a super-sized road (so Canberra!) near the conference venue, reminding us that the capital of the Commonwealth of Australia is on Ngunnawal land.

At the Hotel Realm, we filed into the spacious conference auditorium for the first Keynote Lecture presented by Dr Kirsten Thorpe, researcher and academic, asking: *in the three decades since Henrietta Fourmile's "Who Owns The Past? Aborigines as captives of the archives" (1989), are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still captives of the Archives?*

Thorpe persuasively argued that while we have increased awareness of Indigenous people's self-determination, archival institutions must provide more support and recognition of sovereignty. Thorpe focussed on six areas of harm in need of change:

- Our archival models and knowledge systems continue to silence and subjugate, and even protocols such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services (ATSILIRN) continue to privilege collecting institutions and don't acknowledge harms.
- We need to recognise the role of Archives in the Colonial Project. 'White fragility' is real and still not willing to be compromised.
- Lack of indigenous self-determination and not enough harm minimisation within collections. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their sense of space in archival institutions is still precarious.
- Sovereignty issues and indigenous cultural concepts are not seriously engaged with, and often still viewed as conflicting with institutional goals.
- White blindfold view of history continues the patterns of erasure within archives.
- While the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum (GLAM) sector is beginning to recognise issues of cultural load (ie. additional workload borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, where they are either the only Indigenous person or one of a small number of Indigenous people), it has only just started to address this.

Kirsten proposed four models for action by institutions, characterised by concepts of: Reclamation, Truth-telling, Restoration and Representation in support of indigenous well-being and sovereignty. This includes locally-informed protocols, improved searching capacity to connect people and place, and support for community allies and translators.

The Loris Williams Memorial Lecture was presented by Rose Barrowcliffe. Rose's archival research led to a blog post about archival collecting practices through the lens of the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprising that won the Mander Jones award. In 2021, Rose was appointed the inaugural First Nations Archives Advisor to the Queensland State Archives helping governments to understand how records can be used for Indigenous self-determination during the truth telling and Treaty process.

In her presentation, Rose reminded us that although we are in the midst of a 'trust crisis' fueled by the pandemic, archives are a space where ethics should always reside. However, archivists need to put more energy and resources into supporting indigenous peoples' right to know and right to reply. This support includes allowing better access to the evidence required for truth-telling and Treaty processes, including records related to people's connection to country.

Rose reminded us that white privilege means not having to learn about the difficult history of colonial violence and invasion wars, but as leaders in the memory space, we can and should call out mistruths and support truth-telling. This includes moving beyond providing access to only you/me records in the collection. To ensure evidence of indigenous sovereignty and connection to country can be found in our collections, our records need to be appropriately described, and better metadata is the place to start.

The keynote by Dr Megan Davis, *Natural Capital Accounting and Environmental Governance*, on day two of the conference gave me a better understanding of carbon markets in Australia.

Megan spoke about the limitations of the current paradigm which is for the world to be net-zero or 'nature-positive' we require new economic markets, and a shift from public funding to private models. Natural capital accounting is a way of measuring nature so that it can be traded and so the argument goes, be better protected. In Australia, the Clean Energy Regulator operates and also monitors the Carbon Farming Initiative Act, and the currency is the Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU).

Issues with the current scheme include poor measures, lack of governance and transparency, eg. a Public Offset Register. The newly elected government will review the effectiveness of the ACCU scheme, but whether significant changes will be made is not yet clear. The scheme's effectiveness relies on good records and data, so I believe archivists need to monitor developments in this space.

The final session was a panel of Dr Maggie Walters, David Fricker and Dr Richard Denniss discussing archives/truth telling/indigenous data sovereignty. The conversation was divergent, but common themes were: the need for open and inclusive governance, better access to information and greater recognition of diversity and other knowledge structures.

Reflection: As an opportunity to engage with professional peers and respected colleagues a face-to-face conference can't be beat. I reconnected with my peers and made new connections over copious snack-breaks and cups of conference tea. Canberra put on some fabulous weather and the venue was excellent, located very close to my hotel, with good coffee options nearby.

Rose Barrowcliffe and Kirsten Thorpe continue important conversations about indigenous voices in the archives and our responsibilities as archivists to support access. Their thought-provoking presentations as well as Dr Megan Davis' keynote about Natural Capital Accounting and Environmental Governance were highlights for me, but the quality and content of all the sessions I attended were incredible. The diversity and breadth of archival scholarship and knowledge continues to expand, and that is very exciting for future ASA conference attendees.

Hybrid conferences will future-proof professional associations. Virtual events can offer prestigious speakers and interesting programs without the expense and difficulty of travel, support diversity and inclusion. As an example, the Privacy session on day one of the conference consisted entirely of pre-recorded or online presentations which were excellent.

Thank You: As a recipient of one of two Sharman Awards for 2022, I would like to thank the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) for making my attendance possible. I would like to thank the organising committee, speakers and convenors, vendors and sponsors, support staff and volunteers as well as every single attendee who helped make the event truly memorable.

Final Note: I was so inspired by the conference that I attended the ASA Tasmanian Branch AGM and became a committee member!