

Annette Carter: Sharman Award Report

Rising to our challenges: archives at the 'G

4-7 September 2023- Naarm/Melbourne and online

As a College Historian and President of a small rural Historical Society, I have often felt professionally isolated. The Sharman Award provided me with the opportunity to attend Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) Annual Conference in Melbourne, where I aimed to engage, learn, and connect with fellow professionals. This marked my third ASA Conference, and I am grateful for the bursary that allowed me to attend in person.

AGM and Mander Jones Awards

Arriving at the Melbourne Cricket Ground venue on Monday afternoon, I was greeted by friendly and familiar faces. The AGM proceeded efficiently, almost too efficiently, leaving us with some time to spare. After a brief break, the Mander Jones Awards commenced, and we listened to the citations of deserved winners. As the President of a small Historical Society, I couldn't help but wonder how the Port Macquarie Historical Society managed to produce such outstanding publications!

Rising to our Challenges

One of the highlights of the conference was the diverse range of discussions. A huge thank you goes to the organising committee for being able to have such interesting presentations on a variety of subjects.

Tuesday started with a hugely engaged audience listening to Dr Mandy Nicholson. This inspirational Welcome to Country talked about the importance of archivists and their collections to help unpack "sleeping" pieces of the puzzle. We were able to witness this with a ceremonial dance, performed by the Djirri-djirri dance group, that had been rekindled from old records.

The Opening Keynote was presented by Professor Eleanor Burke who is part of the indigenous-led Yoorrook Justice Commission. She talked us through the fragmented recordkeeping of missions and the importance of truth-telling and gathering historic records of injustices. They aim for systematic change of both criminal and child protection agencies.

Following the opening keynote, I attended the Advocacy and Outreach stream:

- Laura Sizer (Monash University) offered insights on engaging internal staff, emphasising the importance of demonstrating that archives are not just repositories but invaluable resources for the institution.
- James Bosanquet and Althea Rodricks (National Trust) discussed the challenges of presenting a cohesive narrative using primary sources in a historic house – Everglades House and Gardens.
- Nova Watson (Queensland State Archives) touched on social isolation issues and introduced the Memory Lounge initiative, illustrating how archives can bridge communities and prompt meaningful discussions. They have established a pilot project to set up in other communities.

Loris Williams Memorial Lecture

The Loris Williams Memorial Lecture was a discussion between Yorta Yorta/Wemba Wemba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung woman Maree Clarke and Dr Frances Edmonds. Their dialogue centred on the concept of a living archive. 'Maree's Backyard' served as a backdrop for sharing cultural experiences with family and students, transforming these experiences into an online living archive for ongoing knowledge exchange.

I then attended the Lightening Talks:

- Mariane O'Hara (Public Record Office Victoria) emphasised the importance of digital recordkeeping training and introduced their eLearning portal.
- Andrew Harris and Imogen Telfer (Public Record Office Victoria) presented a successful solution for rescuing at-risk records.
- Nicole Rawson (Brett Whitely Studio) showcased a project cataloguing Brett Whitely's personal music collection.
- Ann McCarthy worked with the Diane Barwick collection (University of Melbourne), accessioning, and creating a Finding Aid to give access to Barwick's records.
- Rosalind Malone (Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School) delved into the challenges and risks associated with AI in archives.
- Dr Louise Curham (Curtin University) introduced the "Kambah People's Map," a project documenting the experiences of the Kambah community.

Conference Plenary

On Wednesday morning, the conference plenary celebrated 45 years of the Australian Queer Archives. The Archives play a vital role in allowing the LGBTIQ+ communities to define their place in history with inclusivity and dignity. However, digital preservation emerged as a common challenge for the sector.

Followed up with the Digital Transformation stream:

- Anna Henry (National Library of New Zealand) discussed the collection of social media and the challenges associated with misinformation and archiving without permission.
- Helena Grehan (Murdoch University) and Benjamin Smith (University of Western Australia) highlighted their successful digitisation centre.
- Gionni Di Gravio (University of Newcastle) examined the challenges facing collecting institutions and preserving at-risk collections in the face of 'managerialism'.

And then the Processing Archives stream:

- Adam Kauschke and Kate Sergeant (University of South Australia) shared their experiences with the Prime Ministerial Centre, emphasising the value of collaboration between librarians and archivists.
- Rachel Cullen and Judith Paterson (National Archives of Australia) discussed leveraging digitisation to enhance business processes.
- Debra Paisley (University of Western Australia) expanded on the WA digitisation centre's role in national research infrastructure.

Closing Plenary

The Closing Plenary concluded with an insightful Q&A session between Pia Andrews and Barbara Reed, focussing on the significance of recordkeeping in government and governance. The discussion emphasised the importance of the public sector in shaping society and the need for structural, systematic, and cultural change.

Pia's call to action urged us to be innovators and stewards of trust, stressing that small changes can have a significant impact. I am committed to taking these lessons back to my own work.