

2024 Sharman Award Report; Donna Cusack

Opening the Archives: Access, Engagement, Innovation

Joint conference with ASA (Australian Society of Archivists) and ARNZ (Archives & Records Association of NZ) and PARBICA (Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives). 22-25 October, Ōtautahi | Christchurch. 400 attendees; 237 in person 160 online

Being able to attend the *Opening the Archives* Conference couldn't come at a more fortunate time in my professional development and the goals of the organisation I work for. Surrounding myself with inspiring experts to learn and potentially shape an organisational archive policy was made possible through The Sharman Award – THANK YOU.

As my first ASA Conference, I am grateful that the Sharman Bursary allowed me to attend in person. Each day was full of learning, appreciating and absorbing philosophical, theoretical and practical content. With such a diverse range of discussions I was like the 'kid in the candy shop' and slept each night dreaming of improved process, problems solved and a future where funding and resources are abundant...

Over the course of three days almost 400 passionate individuals discussed the joy and tribulation of guardianship for histories from practical care sessions to robust conversations around accessibility at what cost, and the usual suspects of advocacy and resourcing.

By day 3 I had an acronym journal, a notepad full of inspirational scribbles and a million photo's to be able to reflect on. I returned to work with so many catch phrases and so much enthusiasm I think I may have been pretty annoying!

Day by day; my immersions

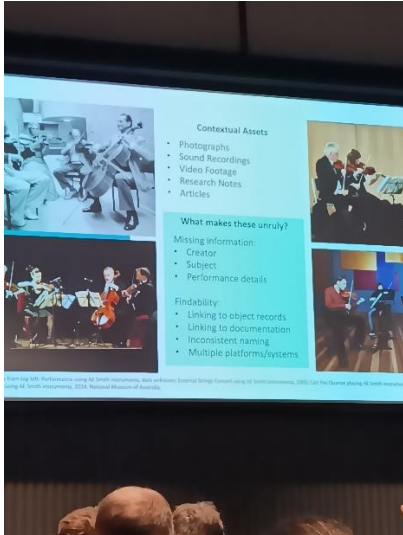
Tuesday 22 October Welcome Reception. There were several reasons why I was incredibly nervous; relatively new to the industry, not a university graduate in the field, really an introvert in an extrovert's body...however the broad smiles and warm reception from the organising committee put me at ease instantly. An initiative for first-time attendees was the "Buddy System" and I cannot thank Luisa Moscato enough for taking me under her very stylish wing.

Wednesday 23 October **Opening Keynote** was presented by Dr Stanley Griffin (Senior Lecturer/head Of Department. Department of Library and Information Studies, The University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica). His presentation *Showcasing Memory: Opening Society to its Archives* was such a powerful and engaging example of the importance of culture, heritage and what defines and archive.



Session 1c. Digital Preservation Coalition Panel – preserving ‘unruly’ digital objects

This impressive panel of DPC member organisations from Australasia and Asia-Pacific covered the many elements of preserving, managing and exhibiting digital content that fall outside the perception of ‘traditional’ archives. Presentations covered the trials and challenges associated with digital content, identifying various states, stages and stability in the ever-changing world of electronics and technology. So many practical insight into how digital preservation decisions are made and challenges many of the existing concepts of archival collection.



Loris Williams Memorial Lecture. *Toi Tū He Whakaputanga! Toi Tū te Tiriti!* (Declaration Treaty)

Hinerangi Himiona delivered this moving address inviting the audience to consider the challenges Māori communities face in relation to archives, the gaps in storytelling and interpretation of record keeping. Himiona was effective in offering insight while encouraging hope and describing her aspirations for future guardianship.

Conference Plenary. Plenary Panel - *Nā te iwi, mā te iwi! By the tribe, for the tribe!*

The panel explored the rich history of the Ngāi Tahu Archive at Archives New Zealand. It highlighted the collaborative efforts behind mapping place names throughout the motu, all of which can be accessed online through an impressive digital platform. So much fun, personal insight and cool proof of concept!

Day 1. C-Individual Papers: The three papers presented covered a spectrum of thought-provoking topics. Lachlan Glanville’s *The Map is (not) the Territory* had me reaching for a bigger notepad! Followed up by and an emotional response to Violet Hamence-Davies *Personal Recordkeeping Technologies and Intimate-Partner Violence*. Clearly Ms Hamence-Davies’ work with Good Shepherd was apparent and came from intimate knowledge in her reflections on how best to support the needs of victim-survivors. Lastly in this session was Narissa Timbery. *From Visualising Country to Living Archives on Country*. Narissa’s pragmatic and practical approach was inspiring and relatable – thank you.

Rounding out the day was the **conference dinner** at the Cardboard Cathedral, Such a pleasant way to ease beyond the immersive day while still being able to discuss and reflect on learnings.

Thursday 24 October. Conference keynote: ‘*She is the female speck in the history of texts. And she is the scout of its presence*’: *The Art and Writing of Emily Cumming Harris*

Prior to the conference I fell in love with this excerpt of a sentence from Michele Leggott and Catherine Field Dodgson “With the evidence to hand and a desire for nosing out more.....” I was waiting in anticipation of this keynote tracing Emily Harris’s life and work, and it did not disappoint – I couldn’t stop smiling.



Day 2. Panel 3B. *Open. To whom? For whom? And with what consequences?*

Each panel members talk was over so quickly. The panel comfortably and emphatically and highlighted issues around openness in archival collections and their associated use/s. Understanding when openness is or is not appropriate, the layering of ethics and how records protocols should be managed. Each person’s openness in communicating how to sensitively consider the needs and realities of people of vulnerable socio-economic situations, marginalised, children and youth, mental health problematic behaviours and abuse was; moving, admirable, unsettling, engrossing, fulfilling. If I ever find myself in Arizona or the UK, I know I will visit the Audrey Amiss Archive and the P. Carl Transitional Eyewear eyeglass collection.



Day 2. 4C - Panel. *Futuring archives - Imagining the records and archives professions in 2050*

This insightful group polished off their crystal balls for a perceptive overview of what our industry might look like by 2050. In equal measure concerning and exciting this was a robust conversation on what our collective responsibility for building our future together may contain.

Pre Panel Paper: *Archival outreach and research trends prior to and following the Covid-19 Pandemic: Highlights from the EGRSO (International Council on Archives) survey, 2020-2023*

Professor Saurombe’s meticulous coverage of the comparison findings between two ICA surveys (2020 and 2023) exposed the growing awareness of AI use/need, digitisation, access and engagement trends. It was fascinating to acknowledge variations in priorities between geography, social climate and indigenous needs.

Closing Conference National Archivist Panel. *Opening national archives: A critical conversation*

The National Archivist Panel, featuring Anahera Morehu, Timoci Balenaivalu, Mamao Tafao, and Simon Froude, convened to share insights from national archivists across the region. This important discussion delved into the impacts of geographic diversity, historical and cultural influences, resource availability, technological advancements, and ongoing changes in the field.

Friday 25th October Greeting old friends. Workshops.

Opening Digital Archives. Nicola Caldwell. This workshop was delightfully entertaining and informative. Our ‘real-life’ scenarios offered such practical application of working with born-digital collections. Thank you, Nicola.



Copyright Essentials. Sarah Powell. Speed dating for copyright. Understanding as an archive professional; the- what, when, where, how of copyright. Sarah was incredibly patient and calm as she delved into this complex arena of copyright principles and legislation.



Conclusion. It was such a privilege to connect with archivists from across the country and around the world, each contributing unique insights and compelling stories. This exchange was incredibly motivating as I find my footing as a new archivist. The passion and energy displayed by the speakers were infectious, and the discussions prompted me to reflect deeply on the meaning and responsibilities that come with being an archivist.

Finally, thank you to the organising committee for the dedication and work in delivering such a successful conference, and to the Australian Society of Archivists and the Sharman Award Committee for their encouragement in helping me attend this year’s conference.