

2025 Sharman Bursary Award Recipient – Naomi Skelly

I was honestly blown away when I found out I'd been awarded a Sharman Bursary to attend the 2025 ASA Conference. After being away from the GLAM sector for five years, I'd found my way back through a casual digitisation role and then, quickly, into an Archives Manager position. I was keen as mustard to get to the conference as someone newly back in the profession, hoping to learn, meet people, and really land myself in the role.

The conference delivered all of that and more. It was incredibly affirming to hear so many people speak with genuine passion about their work. The opening keynote by Gailyn Bopp set the tone for me straight away. Her encouragement to physically sit with collection material and allow it to “speak” really resonated. She spoke powerfully about the importance of Indigenous knowledge in telling the story of a nation, and about the need to stop avoiding uncomfortable histories. We can't keep sweeping past atrocities under the carpet - we need to face them honestly, ask hard questions like *why was this collected in the first place?*, and look for solutions. Being trusted with the custodianship of a collection is a privilege I don't take lightly and hearing how others care for their collections was both humbling and inspiring. It cemented how grateful I am to be back in the GLAM sector.

One of the biggest takeaways for me was learning more about the barriers Indigenous communities face when trying to access material, often created unintentionally through privacy protections. I also had a classic “I didn't know I needed this” moment. A presentation I assumed might be a bit dry - *Introducing the Berndt Museum Archive* - turned out to be one of the best sessions I attended. It completely shifted how I think about anthropological collections in Australia and gave me real hope that knowledge thought to be lost may still exist elsewhere, held by people actively trying to open access rather than gatekeep it.

As a first-generation Australian from Malta - a country invaded time and again yet still holding strong to its identity - I've long thought about how Australia can be proud of its deep Indigenous ancestry alongside its scarred Anglo-Saxon history. There's a lot of healing still to be done on this land. Telling these stories bravely is part of that healing. Yes, ripping off the band-aid will hurt, but leaving it there only lets the wound fester.

The bursary also made it possible for me to travel to Sydney and meet fellow Catholic Church archivists. With the annual Catholic archivists' conference cancelled in 2025 due to health circumstances, this was an important opportunity I otherwise would have

missed. I made the most of lunch breaks and after-hours sessions to seek people out and talk openly about access, transparency, and the responsibility we carry to tell church histories as they actually happened, not softened or hidden, as a step towards healing.

I came back to Hobart on a real high. Full of energy and ideas, I organised the ASA Tasmania Branch's 50th anniversary celebration. Seeing archivists come together, swap conference stories, and enjoy each other's company was genuinely joyful (and yes, my conference bag and badge became decorations). I'm so happy to be part of the GLAM sector again and excited to keep going deeper into the world of archives.

I would like to sincerely thank the Australian Society of Archivists and the Sharman Awards committee for the support provided through this bursary. It made my attendance possible and has had a lasting impact on my professional practice.