

FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETIES INC

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1) Liberating heritage collections

2009 September 11

[Copyright](#), [government2.0](#), [Information Management](#)

by Adrian Cunningham

What does Government 2.0 mean for the world of archives, records and information management more broadly? The short answer is, much more than you might have thought. A longer answer follows (in somewhat discursive form).....

First of all it provides a tremendous opportunity to unlock the hidden potential of archival collections. Public institutions in Australia hold hundreds, probably thousands, of shelf-kilometres of archival materials. Because of funding and other practical limitations the majority of this material is difficult to get access to. Because archives are created in the course of organisations and individuals going about their business, they are not created with a view to making it easy for some future researcher to find their way through them.

Archival catalogues and finding aids aim to assist researchers navigate their way through these collections, but the sheer bulk of most public archives and relatively small number of archivists employed to catalogue them inevitably means that, for most archival holdings, researchers need to be clever, persistent and a little lucky to find what they might be looking for. Add to this the fact that the physical location of original paper records is usually hundreds or thousands of kilometres away from where most Australians live and it is not surprising that very few rarely ever darken the doorstep of an archival institution, much less pluck up the courage to try to make sense of the often bewildering catalogues and finding aids.

The advent of the Web has been changing that paradigm, such that now many archives have web interfaces to their finding aids and are busy placing digitised copies of records on the web for easy (though not always free) access. Statistics tell us that this approach to providing access to archives is overwhelmingly popular with both established and new users. Indeed, community expectations are such that if archival resources are not available on the Web they may as well not exist as far as the overwhelming majority of users are concerned. Web 2.0 offers an almost infinite array of possibilities for opening up avenues for access to and use of these resources. There are enormous possibilities for mashups, clever visualisations and user tagging of resources.

Harnessing the 'wisdom of the crowd' means that we can have millions of 'archivists' now creating metadata and archival finding aids – indeed whole new online archival collections, not just the overworked handful of archivists who have these duties in their job descriptions. For instance, the National Archives of Australia's [Mapping our Anzacs site](#) mashes digitised copies of World War 1 service records and their archival metadata with geospatial metadata to provide a whole new means of access to and

navigation of these popular records. In addition, a scrapbook facility allows users to upload their own family history information, hyperlinks and digitised records relating to the individual concerned – thus creating a much more valuable set of historical resources.

Copyright can be a major headache for archives wishing to make their collections more available and useable. Usually archives, while they might own their physical collections as objects, they will not own the copyright that resides in them. To make matters worse, according to the [Copyright Act](#) unpublished ‘manuscripts’ (ie archives) are in perpetual copyright. Yes that’s right – they are in copyright FOREVER unless the copyright owner (if they can be found) gives permission for them to be published. I think Australia is the only country anywhere that has such a strange provision in its statute books.

(Source: maus-archivists@archivists.org.au – 14 September 2009)

2) New resource – best practice: a cultural resource for Australia’s galleries and museums

A new resource for the collections sector will help galleries and museums across the nation better manage their collections, Arts Minister Peter Garrett said today.

Mr Garrett said the new publication *Collecting cultural material: principles for best practice* will be an invaluable resource particularly for smaller galleries and museums.

”Despite the best efforts of many collecting institutions, provenance information for some cultural material can be incomplete or unobtainable and this book has been designed to give help and guidance.

“It outlines important principles and guidelines, drawing on the experience of some of Australia’s best practitioners and major cultural institutions.

“It is an easy to understand resource setting out a legal and ethical framework for acquiring cultural material and advice regarding due diligence, such as what to do if there are doubts about an object’s legal status, or how to deal with a request for return of an object.

“I congratulate the collaborators on this excellent book and online resource for this initiative and for the work they do under the umbrella of the Heads of Cultural Institutions (HOI),” Mr Garrett said.

Collecting cultural material: principles for best practice is available for download at www.arts.gov.au/hoci, or a hardcopy can be ordered by emailing hoci@environment.gov.au

Members of the HOCI include:

- Ron Radford, Director, National Gallery of Australia
- Craddock Morton, Director, National Museum of Australia
- Jan Fullerton, Director, National Library of Australia
- Mary-Louise Williams, Director, Australian National Maritime Museum
- Darryl McIntyre, CEO, National Film and Sound Archive
- Deborah Ely, CEO, Bundanoon Trust
- Andrew Sayers, Director, National Portrait Gallery
- Jenny Anderson, Director, Museum of Australian Democracy
- Graham Durant, Director, Questacon
- Russell Taylor, CEO, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

(Source: Press Release – Minister for Environment and Heritage and The Arts, Hon P. Garrett MP – 2 September 2009)

3) Keeping the nation's memory alive through archives

From the design of the country's flags through to 1930s tourism posters and the personal papers of past Prime Ministers, Australia's archives are filled with treasures.

How best to manage those treasures is a critical issue for archivists who, from today, will receive a helping hand through the launch of a website, Keeping Archives.

Produced by the Australian Society of Archivists, Keeping Archives promotes and extends the acclaimed Keeping Archives practical guide that has sold 1,200 copies worldwide.

Noel Turnbull, Chairman of the Collections Council of Australia, who launched the website at the State Library of Victoria, said both the book and the website demonstrated world's best practice in the care and use of archives.

"Archives are an important part of the collections sector, grounding our culture and democracy as well as our personal and national identities," said Mr Turnbull.

"What the Keeping Archives website does is use the internet to show those who are interested how to manage and safeguard archives. The website also highlights the important role that archivists play in keeping our nation's memory alive," said Mr Turnbull.

Mr Turnbull said the project underscored the crucial need for Australia to invest seriously in digitising its collections, and also in looking after those collections.

“The Collections Council of Australia will continue to call on the Federal Government to invest \$700,000 over two years for the Collections Council of Australia to develop an Australian Framework for Digital Heritage Collections.”

Jackie Bettington, President of Australian Society of Archivists, said the website would particularly assist archivists located in regional and remote areas around Australia, as well as early career archivists.

“The real life challenges associated with maintaining and managing archives for today and tomorrow are many. Keeping Archives is the Society’s contribution to helping guide our present and future archivists,” she said.

“Keeping Archives is packed with practical examples and advice about storage, preservation, acquisition, promoting and managing moving images, sound recordings and advocacy.”

She said the book, now in its third edition, is a set text for many university courses in Australia and overseas. Keeping Archives 3rd edition can be ordered online (<http://www.keepingarchives.com.au>) for \$145, which includes posting and handling within Australia. Those who join the Australian Society of Archivists receive a discount on the publications and workshops conducted by the Society.

About the Australian Society of Archivists <http://www.archivists.org.au> The ASA is Australia’s peak organisation for archivists and recordkeeping professionals and practitioners. It aims to strengthen the role and impact of archives and archivists within Australia, and to contribute to research, training, standards and publications related to the archival profession.

About the Collections Council of Australia <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au> The Collections Council works to encourage care and use of the nation’s collections so that they will always inspire, amaze, inform and delight Australians and the world. It is Australia’s national peak body representing the shared interests of archives, galleries, libraries and museums. The organisation was initiated by the Cultural Ministers Council.’

(Source: aus-archivists@archivists.org.au – 28 August 2009)

4) Tasmanian State Archivist to retire

‘The Premier of Tasmania, Hon David Bartlett MP, paid tribute on 3 September 2009 to the retiring State Archivist Ian Pearce who leaves his position on 30 September 2009.

“Mr Pearce has spent 41 years working for the State Service initially as an archivist in the 1960’s and later returning as the Deputy State Archivist from 1973 to 1984 and as the State Archivist for the past 25 years.

“Ian was chair of the Council of Australasian Archives and records Authorities for over a decade in the 1990s and 2000s - the peak body for the heads of archival institutions in the States and territories and New Zealand.

“Among Ian’s achievements is the addition of Tasmania's convict records to the International Memory of the World register - at the time it had only two entries from Australia on it,” he said.

Mr Bartlett said that Ian played a major part in the development of the 1983 *Archives Act* which was considered the leading piece of archival legislation in Australia at the time.

“The development of the use of computer based systems for archival management and access provision - later using internet based resources for public access to the holdings of the Archives Office and their contents was another of Ian's achievements.

“The growth of Archives Office staff and storage resources (the State Archives now take up about 18 kilometres of records) has grown considerably during Ian’s leadership.

“The preservation of the State’s archives is an important part of Ian’s role as well as the management of making these records known and accessible to members of the public through the Archives Office.

“I would like to thank Ian for his dedication to the position and untiring commitment – I am sure he will be missed,” the Premier said.

(Source: A Mailing List for Australian Archivists – 7 September 2009)

5) New models for libraries

"The stereotypical library is dying - and it's taking its shushing ladies, dank smell and endless shelves of books with it. Books are being pushed aside for digital learning centres and gaming areas. 'Loud rooms' that promote public discourse and group projects are taking over the bookish quiet. Hipster staffers who blog, chat on Twitter and care little about the Dewey Decimal System are edging out old-school librarians." <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/TECH/09/04/future.library.technology/>

(Source: aliaaglin@lists.alia.org.au – 7 September 2009)

6) CULTURAL HERITAGE online – Empowering users: an active role for user communities

**Conference, 15-16 December 2009
Florence - Italy**

Following the success of the previous conference held in 2006, the Foundation Rinascimento Digitale, in collaboration with the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities and the Library of Congress, is delighted to announce the 2nd edition: “CULTURAL HERITAGE online Empowering users: an active role for user communities”. The conference aims to explore, analyze, and evaluate the state of the art and future trends in user communities and cultural contents on the web from an international perspective, and bring together academic researchers, policy makers and

practitioners, providing a forum for the discussion and dissemination of the selected themes.

Internet continues to have an impressive impact on cultural heritage and humanist communities by affecting the way they work, use, exchange and produce knowledge. New architectures and radically different paradigms arise continuously engendering a deep rethinking of traditional roles and tasks. Though a continuous increase in ICT use has spread in the cultural heritage community, cultural institutions have been slower to adopt new technologies for cultural, economic and organizational reasons. Today it seems that users not only are able to adapt to technological changes faster than cultural institutions, but they are also driving innovation, by proposing new ideas and building up new paradigms of knowledge production.

The conference will start on the 15th of December with keynote lectures that investigate user needs and expectations, analysing how to better involve users and the cultural heritage community in creating and sharing digital resources. The plenary session on the 16th will start with the presentation of national and international scenarios, followed by two thematic sessions with scientific speeches selected through a Call for Papers.

Main Topics

- Cultural heritage and interactive Web
- Digital libraries
- Digital humanities
- Cooperation among museums, archives, libraries
- Digital preservation

Who should attend

- Cultural heritage institutions administrators and curators
- Digital humanities researchers and students
- Cultural tourism operators
- **Professional associations in the fields of museums, archives, libraries**
- Funding agencies
- Technology providers and developers ‘

Find the program at : <http://www.rinascimento-digitale.it/conference2009-programme.phtml>

(Source: Aus-archivists ListServ – 10 September 2009)

7) ACARA welcomes inaugural Chief Executive Officer

News announcement

9 September 2009

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) today welcomed Dr Peter Hill as the authority's first Chief Executive Officer.

ACARA Board Chair, Professor Barry McGaw AO, said “This is an outstanding appointment. It is a coup for Australia that Dr Hill is choosing to return to lead ACARA’s efforts in helping to build a world-class school education system here.”

The full press release is available under ‘Latest News’ on the ACARA website – www.acara.edu.au

(Source: www.acara.edu.au)

8) Release of movie “Van Diemen’s Land”

A new Australian movie entitled “Van Diemen’s Land” will be released in cinemas in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Hobart on 24 September.

“1822: Eight desperate convicts’ infamous escape into the beautiful and brutal Tasmanian wilderness. God wields an axe and there can be only one survivor: Alexander Pearce.” (quote from Press kit)

For more details, see website: <http://www.vandiemensland-themovie.com/>

(Source: Madman Entertainment www.madman.com.au)

9) Local history – Irvinebank, Queensland – Council to relinquish trusteeship of Irvinebank State Treatment Works precinct

Tablelands Regional Council will formally advise the State Government that it wishes to relinquish the trusteeship of Irvinebank’s historical State Treatment Works precinct because it does not have the funds to preserve the site.

Council will write to the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) to formally advise them of the decision and will provide the department with a copy of the Conservation Management Plan once the site has been handed back to the State.

The plan identified that the Treatment Works would have "considerable tourism and interpretative opportunities", however a number of obligations would need to be met if the site was to be re-used.

The plan noted that:

- significant works would be needed to be carried out to provide safe access for general public;

- there were various contamination issues around the site;
- there were various environmental issues which would require investigation and the development of a practical landscape design and maintenance schedule which did not impact on the heritage values of the place;
- it would be essential to develop a re-use or business plan for the site and that the business plan should be complemented by an interpretation plan that provided a comprehensive but practical and economically realistic solution to enable visitors to access at least parts of the complex.

In a report prepared by Gordon Grimwade in 2008, costs to develop the site as a business enterprise were estimated to be between \$700,000 and \$1 million.

Council has received a letter from DERM advising that if Council relinquishes control of the site, the department would secure the site and continue to do periodic maintenance but would not commit to undertake any repairs to the buildings or infrastructure within the precinct.

(Source: <http://www.trc.qld.gov.au/news/council-relinquish-trusteeship-irvi> - Council Press Release - 4 September 2009)

10) Local history –Greenough, Western Australia – Pioneer Museum

The Historical Society at Greenough established in 1966 is said to be the oldest north of Perth. It is 405 kms north of Perth on the Brand Highway and 19kms south of Geraldton. The Society has 80 members. The Greenough Pioneer Museum is operated by local historian, Gary Martin. It has an extensive collection of local artefacts from the home of local settlers. A significant item in the museum collection is a camel wagon which operated in Western Australia. The Society has raised \$70,000 to restore it.

The museum is located 405 kilometres north of Perth on the Brand Highway and 19kms south of Geraldton. The area is known as the Greenough Front Flats which is highly fertile. The Greenough Pioneer Museum is a carefully restored two storey homestead set in shady gardens. The homestead of 11 rooms was built between 1862 and 1880 for John Maley, miller, storekeeper, hotel proprietor, entrepreneur and father of 14 children. Maley was known locally as the "King of the Flats." His wife, Elizabeth was the daughter of the first German migrants to Western Australia. The museum shop stocks an extensive collection of local history books and souvenirs.

The email address for the museum is: greenoughhistory@westnet.com.au

(Sources: Personal Visit 31 August 2009; Website: <http://www.greenough-pioneer-museum.com>)