



The University of Sydney

2004

# RECORD

**The University Archives**

**Archives and Records Management Services**

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**ARMS**  
Archives and Records  
Management Services

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# General Information

Established in 1954, the Archives is part of Archives and Records Management Services in the Secretariat and Corporate Information Unit of the Registrar's Division. The Archives retains the records of the Senate, the Academic Board and those of the many administrative offices which control the functions of the University of Sydney. It also holds the archival records of some institutions which have amalgamated with the University, such as Sydney CAE (and some of its predecessors such as Sydney Teachers College), Sydney College of the Arts, the Conservatorium of Music, and the College of Health Sciences. The Archives also houses a collection of photographs of University interest, both prints and negatives, and University publications of all kinds. In addition, the Archives holds significant collections of the archives of persons and bodies closely associated with the University.

The reading room and repository are on the 9th floor of the Fisher Library, and the records are available by appointment for research use by all members of the University and by the general public. It is important to note that while housed within the Fisher Library, the Archives are not a part of the University Library and have different hours and conditions of use. Access to records is permitted only under the direct control and supervision of the Manager, Archives and Records Management Services, or staff of the Archives. Access to administrative records is governed by the NSW State Records Act 1998, the NSW Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 and/or the NSW Freedom of Information Act 1989. Restricted access conditions may apply to some records and photocopying of original records is not possible.

It is necessary to make an appointment to use the University Archives. The Archives is open to researchers from 9-1 and 2-5 Monday to Thursday.

Appointments may be made by:

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## Archivist's Notes

This issue of Record commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the University Archives. In many ways it is a companion to the exhibition, On the Record, held with the encouragement and support of the Macleay Museum from November 2004 to February 2005.

As is fitting with such a significant milestone the articles relate to the history of the Archives, particularly the people who have worked here. The first piece documents the exhibition held in the Macleay Museum, explaining the ideas behind it and includes some photographs of the opening and the items. Our thanks and gratitude go to the staff of the Macleay Museum, especially Julian Holland, for all their work in making the exhibition a success.

Following is a chronological list of the staff who have worked in the Archives from the appointment of David Macmillan as foundation University Archivist in 1954. Every effort has been made to ensure the listing is as accurate as the records allow, should there be any errors or omissions we will gladly make corrections.

Many users of the Archives may not be aware that its origins may be traced to 1913. In 1991 I wrote a piece for Record on the University's Honorary Archivists from 1913 to 1952. This is reprinted in an edited form in this issue. Next is an article by Ken Smith, University Archivist from 1980 to 1997. Ken has researched and written an account of his predecessors: David Macmillan and Gerald Fischer. Old friends of the Archives will be pleased to see

Ken's name back in Record. I am very gratified that Gerald kindly agreed to prepare some reminiscences of his time as Archivist, from 1969 to 1980. They make fascinating reading. Ken was too modest to write of his own great contribution to the Archives and so Julia Mant, our Reference Archivist, interviewed him for the account of his time with the University.

One of the events to mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the University Archives was an essay competition for undergraduate students. A prize of \$500 was offered for the best piece of original research based on records in the Archives. Lara Hall, a second year Arts student, submitted the winning essay titled A P Elkin: Religion and Assimilation. The competition was judged by Professor Geoffrey Sherington of the Faculty of Education, Dr Julia Horne, University Historian, and the reference staff of the Archives. Great thanks are due to all involved especially to Suzy Nunes, Reference Archivist, for all her work on the competition prior to maternity leave.

I cannot end these Notes without recording my particular thanks for the production of this special issue of Record and the successful staging of the exhibition in the Macleay Museum to the indefatigable Julia Mant. Without Julia our Jubilee Year would not have achieved the recognition it deserved.

T J Robinson  
February 2005

# ON THE RECORD

## *Fifty Years of the University of Sydney Archives*



*Dr William Adams, Registrar, opening On the Record*



*Dennis Foley, Lecturer with the Koori Centre, giving the welcome to country*



*Tim Robinson, Manager ARMS, and Anne Picot, Assistant Manager, ARMS*

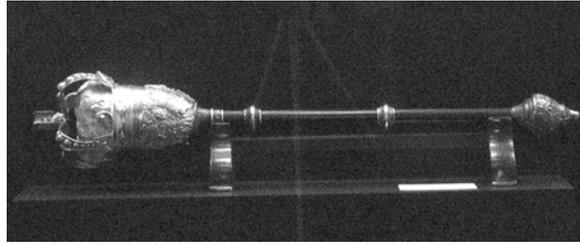
To mark the commencement of the University of Sydney Archives in September 1954 a special jubilee exhibition, *On the Record: Fifty Years of University Archives* was opened on the 4 November 2004 by the Registrar Dr William Adams. Over one hundred guests were in attendance, including distinguished overseas visitors here for the Standards Committee II on Information Technology. Dennis Foley from the Koori Centre gave a wonderful welcome to country, and David Ellis and Tim Robinson spoke on behalf of the Macleay Museum and the Archives.

*On the Record* showcased the range and flavour of University records, examining their varied uses, and exploring both administrative and memorial influences on the establishment of the Archives. Items of both historical and legal importance were on view, including the first student registers, personal papers, architectural plans, photographs and oral history recordings.

Thanks must go to co-curator Julian Holland and staff of the Macleay Museum; the University Historian Dr Julia Horne and Roderic Campbell (SOPHI) who assisted with the audio-visual component; Virginia Buckingham Graphic Design; and Dr William Adams, Registrar, and Colin Brandson and Wallace Bourke, Security Service, in making the University Mace available for display.



*From left: Neil Bateman (ARMS), Michael Smith (University Archivist, UWS), Dr William Adams, Geoff Sommerville & Julia Mant (ARMS), David Ellis (University Museums)*



*University Mace*

Records of student life on show included the autograph album of one of the first students at the Sydney Teachers College at Blackfriars, Broadway in 1906, Nellie Rutherford; the student card of Dr Herbert Vere Evatt; photographs of Commemoration Day floats, and the roneoed Students for a Democratic Society Newsletters from the May Day 1969 protests.

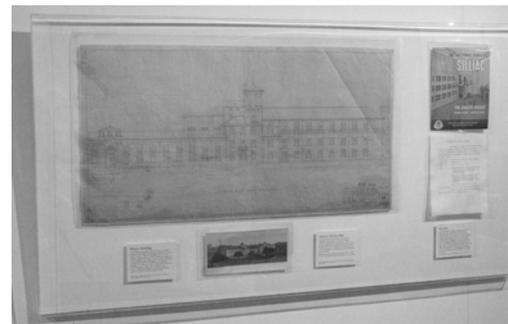
Looking resplendent at the back of the exhibition space, the University Mace, presented to the University in 1854, was on display with the foundation documents of the University, the Royal Charter and Coat of Arms.

The Use of Archives is a main theme of the exhibition and a variety of records on show explore the legal, historical, genealogical, cultural, architectural context of recordkeeping. The AP Elkin Personal Archives, for instance, has been utilised in over seventeen Native Title Tribunal cases in the past five years and the series is a source of linguistic, photographic and geographic records.

Also on display is Leslie Wilkinson's 1922 plan of Physics Building "Western Half North Elevation", and School of Physics records of SILLIAC, the University of Sydney's first computer, built in 1956, and based on the ILLIAC machine in operation at the University of Illinois.



*On the Record*



*Architectural and cultural records of the School of Physics*



*The use of records display, with Harold Cazneaux photographs on far right*



*Student recordkeeping*

# Chronological List of Staff of the Archives, 1954 – 2004

1954

David Macmillan, University Archivist, 1954 – 1968

1969

Gerald Fischer, University Archivist, 1969 – 1980

1974

Edith Kirk, Administrative Support, 1974 – 1976

1977

Margaret Taylor, Assistant to the Archivist, 1977 – 1994

1980

Kenneth Smith, University Archivist, 1980 – 1997

1985

Dr Margaret Dwyer, Archivist, 1985 – 1993

1990

Timothy J Robinson, Assistant University Archivist, (FOI Coordinator and Privacy Officer from 1994)

1993

Marie Alcorn, Archivist (casual), 1993

Carl Baitup, Administrative Assistant (casual), 1993

1994

Samantha Hughes, Archivist (casual), 1994 - 1995

Patricia Jacobsen, Archivist (casual), 1994

Greg Sherington, Administrative Assistant (casual), 1994 – 1996, 1998

Andrew Wilson, Archivist (casual), 1994 – 1996

1996

Robyn Gurney, Archivist (casual) and later Anderson Project Archivist, 1996 – 2000

Angie Rizakos, Archivist (casual), 1996

1997

Renata Mancini, Archivist (casual) and later Reference Archivist and Chambers Project, 1997 – 2001

1998

Timothy J Robinson, Manager, University Archives

Amanda Jones, Administrative Assistant (casual), 1998

1999

Judith Russell, Assistant Manager, University Archives and later ARMS, 1999 – 2001

2000

University Archives becomes part of Archives and Records Management Services

Timothy J Robinson, Manager, Archives and Records Management Services

Jacqueline Langton, Administrative Assistant, 2000–2002

2002

Suzy Nunes, Reference Archivist, 2002 to date

Anne Picot, Assistant Manager, 2002 to date

Caroline Lovell, Archivist (casual), 2002

2003

Nyree Morrison, Reference Archivist (contract), 2003

Maria Toth, Reference Archivist (contract), 2003 – 2004

2004

Julia Mant, Reference Archivist (contract), 2004 to date

## Over the past 50 years additional assistance to the Archives has been provided by:

Registrar's administrative staff, 1954 - 1974

Mark Drury, Union archives, 1985

Keith Jones, 1983, 1984, 1985

Dr Ursula Bygott (University History Project)

Dr David Wood (University History Project)

Narelle Schollay – student, Diploma of Info Management, UNSW, *Guide to the Cotton Archives*, 1985

Alexis Johnson - work experience - *Index to Record*, 1996



*Margaret Taylor with the 'new-look'  
Record, 1982*



*Tim Robinson creating the database to  
Miscellaneous Photographs, 1989*



*Robyn Gurney, Judith Russell, Renate Mancini, Tim Robinson, 1999*



*Ken Smith in the Archives  
Stack, 1982*



*Anne Picot, Suzy Nunes and Hayley Colley  
(Records) during the renovation of the Archives,  
2002*

# The Honorary Archivists, 1913 – 1952

*This is an edited extract of an article that first appeared in Record, No1, 1991 (March) entitled "Origins of the Archives of the University of Sydney, Part One: The Honorary Archivists".*

## Introduction

Prior to the University Archives being established, there had been a number of non-professional archival appointments at the University of Sydney. The earlier archival activity was of a generally antiquarian nature and was strongly associated with the University of Sydney Union. The impact of the two World Wars, particularly the First, also cannot be underestimated. The desire to commemorate the role played by members of the University community through the collection of documents was to be a recurrent theme in the development of archives in the University.

Administrative change within an organization often gives rise to concern for the records of the old order. This was certainly the case with the University of Sydney Union between the period 1911 and 1913, when a separate archives division was proposed for the storage of minute books, account books and all other records of Societies accommodated in the Union.<sup>1</sup> At a meeting of the Union Board on 11 July 1913, the President, Assistant Professor Ernest Rudolph Home suggested both the creation of the office of Honorary Archivist to the Union, and an Archives Sub-Committee.<sup>2</sup> John Le Gay Brereton, then Assistant Librarian, held the position of Honorary Archivist until 1918, when he left the Library to take up the Chair of English Literature. The Union Archives were housed in Fisher Library.

While Brereton was concerned about the lack of progress in cataloguing and arranging the Union Archives<sup>3</sup>, the outbreak of the First World War and the involvement of Australian troops provided a focus for the Union's archival collecting activities. On 30 September, Herbert Vere Evatt, as President of the Union, wrote a circular which was printed for distribution with the Annual Report for 1915 – 1916 in which he said: "The Board of Directors intends to collect War Memorials for the Archives" including photographs of Sydney University men on Active Service abroad and biographical details.<sup>4</sup>

Following Brereton's departure, the care of the Union Archives was subject to some confusion. While Fisher Library continued to house the records, there was little active management of the holdings. It was not until 1924 when the advent of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Union highlighted the need for "someone skilled in librarianship for the task of getting the Union archives finally arrayed, catalogued and made ready for reference".<sup>5</sup> That person was Maude Yeomans Fitzhardinge.

## Maude Yeomans Fitzhardinge

As Honorary Archivist of the Union, Maude Fitzhardinge became the first women Archivist working in Australia. She was a member of the legal family founded in Australia by William George Augustus Fitzhardinge (1810-1884). She was born 5 May 1872 and was schooled in Sydney, matriculating in 1895 and entering Women's College at the University in March of that year. Having completed her BA in 1897, Fitzhardinge taught at Ascham school in Darling Point. Her pass MA awarded in 1901 was in Classics.



*Maude Yeomans Fitzhardinge, 1897,  
G3/224/2168*

In July 1901 Fitzhardinge was appointed temporary assistant cataloguer, on probation, in the Public Library of NSW.<sup>6</sup> At the time of her appointment in 1901 Christopher Brennan, with whom Fitzhardinge shared an interest in Classics, was the Cataloguer at the Public Library. Fitzhardinge's position became permanent in the same year. She was upgraded from cataloguer to Library Assistant in 1911, but following a number of months leave without pay, she is recorded again as Cataloguer.

In April 1915 Fitzhardinge transferred to the Department of Public Instruction. In 1916 Fitzhardinge was assistant mistress at Sydney Girls High School. In 1921 she took the position of Head-Mistress of the Church of England Girls Grammar School in Launceston Tasmania, and in 1922 became Head-Mistress of CEGGS in Casino, NSW for one year.

The actual reasons for her interest in the Union Archives and those of the Union in accepting her assistance are not clear. Certainly she had what were then seen as the requisite skills for an archivist, being an experienced cataloguer. However the choice of a woman by the Union seems unusual. At the time women could not become members of the Union, indeed a separate Women's Union had to be established within the University, and women were generally excluded from the Union's facilities.

It is also not clear how Fitzhardinge supported herself during the time she was Honorary Archivist for the Union from 1924 to 1929, as it would not have been a full time occupation. Then in her fifties, Fitzhardinge had probably not retired from paid employment. If she was not employed, Fitzhardinge must have had some private means as she spent most of the decade from 1930 to 1940 in Europe, where she was received by the Pope and Mussolini.<sup>8</sup>

In the July 1924 issue of the *Union Recorder*, the journal of the University Union, Fitzhardinge contributed an article titled "The Archives Sense". It was an appeal to members of the University community involved in clubs and societies to take greater care with the records of their activities. In many ways the article reflected the then generally prevailing antiquarian view of archives but many of Fitzhardinge's frustrations will still ring true with archivists today:

*... the keeping of records is neglected simply because there is no excitement attendant upon it.*

*Undated work, minutes unsigned, uncompleted entries – how their hatefulness seems to grow when they are read over years after they are written.*

*There is no joy in incomplete Archives. ... of all the evils a man can do to the Archives and the body for which he is working, losing the Minutes Book is the most detestable.<sup>9</sup>*

In addition Fitzhardinge appealed for the donation of material relating to the student life at the University and for material to add to the "War Memorials" in the Union Archives. Fitzhardinge stated that photographs or documents relating to Sydney graduates active in the War would be bound into "handsome volumes".<sup>10</sup> This was not done.

Fitzhardinge listed the material that was handed into her care in March 1924.<sup>11</sup> This list is also revealing of the contemporary perception of the nature of archives. In addition to the minutes, accounting and membership records of the Union and of various clubs and societies, were books about the First World War and Germany, some numbers of a German magazine withdrawn from the Union, issues of the *Union Recorder* and *Intelligencer*, *Nature* and *Hermes*. There were also "war letters and photographs", some correspondence and a variety of ephemera. A note at the end of the listing stated that further parcels were received by Fitzhardinge at intervals during 1924 and 1925.

In the same way that the listing of what was preserved and handed over to Fitzhardinge reveals the general perception of archives at the time, her recommendations on what should be preserved in the future gives insight into her own thinking. The recommendations appear to be either notes or a draft, and are dated October 1925.<sup>12</sup> However, no official reports by Fitzhardinge on her work have been located.

Fitzhardinge suggested in her draft that anything related to the Union dated prior to 24 June 1921 (the date of the first *Union Recorder*) should be preserved, "especially anything of the nature of a War Memorial". Concerning publications after that date Fitzhardinge recommended retaining the Union Recorder, Annual or other Reports of the Board of Directors, portraits of Directors "or photographs and the like of buildings of (the) Union" and all publications published at the expense of or by the authority of the Union Directors. A note at the end adds to the list of records to be retained "any information of value regarding the Union or its members presented by outside authorities".

As with any organisation the Union generated many records which did not have any enduring value. Fitzhardinge's draft report states that "it was not really decided what should be done with" such records as wages sheets, vouchers, receipts and election notices. She recorded that the suggestion had been made that a sample of each record be kept each year in the Archives.

Fitzhardinge also provided some recommendations on the retention of War Memorials. She suggested that they were to include letters and "publications of interest" which had been presented to the Union Archives even if they did not relate to members of the Union "e.g. letters from women war workers, and from fighting men or men training for service who were not University students".

It is interesting to note that in the listing of records to retain no mention was made of the Minutes of the Union Board and its committees, or of the correspondence created by the Union. The reasons for this omission are unclear as the early minute books were included in her list of material transferred in 1924. Presumably she would have been aware of the importance of maintaining such records in the future.

Fitzhardinge did in fact arrange some of the correspondence of the Union, dating from the 1880s to 1927 and it remains mostly as she arranged it. Letters were divided into annual groups and then given a three letter identifier based on the surname of the author of the letter or what was seen as the main subject of the letter.<sup>13</sup>

The exact extent of Fitzhardinge's work is difficult to assess. She was thanked for her efforts in the Annual Report of the Union each year from 1924 to 1929, when she left the country. Only in 1926 was there any indication of some of the nature of her work when she was thanked for preparing an index to volume V of the *Union Recorder*.<sup>14</sup>

## Book of Remembrance

The action of the Union in collecting records of the war service of those associated with the University has been mentioned above. The Union had its own War Memorial Committee, as did the University through its Senate committee. There tended to be some cross fertilisation between the committees, with the ideas of one being implemented by the other. This was particularly the case with the *Book of Remembrance*. It should be remembered that the senior officers of the University were often members and office holders in the Union. The University in the 1920s also was not a very large organisation so the co-ordination of related activities was not difficult.

The report of the first meeting of the Union's War Memorial Committee on 4 July 1922 included the decision that: a book containing a list of names of all who served should be compiled in an artistic and permanent manner. Such a book to be an academic and service record of each individual.<sup>15</sup>

This concept was to be taken up later by the War Memorial Committee appointed by Senate in 1924 to administer the construction of the War Memorial Carillon.

At a meeting of the War Memorial Carillon Committee in December 1931 an unsigned report was received making recommendations for the development of the University's War Memorial following the installation of the Rolls of Honour in the archway under the Tower. Included amongst the recommendations was:

*...the securing of a voluntary worker, perhaps an Honorary Archivist of the War Memorial to review, rearrange, and afterwards to keep in perfect order, for at least the time between this and next Armistice Day, all the records of the War Memorial, including the Roll of Service of the University, the material relating to the war in which the Union gathered and placed in its archives in the Fisher Library, and all other historical matter having reference to the University's Roll of Services as, for instance the Commonwealth records of the war, and especially those personal records now kept in the office of the Commonwealth Historian, Dr CEW Bean.*<sup>16</sup>

The committee resolved to ask Professor ER Holme to act as Honorary Archivist. He was to be able to appoint an Assistant Archivist, "or other such help" to bring the records of the War Memorial, including the Roll of Service, "into good order and be available for (the) development requiring them."<sup>17</sup>

The same meeting of the War Memorial Carillon Committee decided that a "Book of Remembrance" should be compiled as soon as possible. This was to record the names of the members of the University who were being commemorated by the Carillon. Further decisions regarding the Book of Remembrance were postponed until the activities of other institutions were investigated and the opinion of Dr Bean and the military authorities were considered.

Holme appears not to have been particularly active as Honorary Archivist, although he did appoint an assistant. Mr George Edward Hall, BE (1914) commenced duties in early 1932 with the title of Honorary Archivist, although Holme himself apparently did not immediately relinquish the title. A letter from Holme to Hall in February 1933 shows that Holme considered that they were working together and should submit a joint report to the War Memorial Carillon Committee.<sup>18</sup> The report, submitted to the July meeting of that Committee was, however, signed by Hall alone.

*Handwritten by Dr. Bean*

*Alth*

*Badge 763*

**Sydney University Union.**

**WAR SERVICE RECORD.**

SURNAME: *HALL*

Rank: *Lieutenant*

Date and Place of Enlistment: *15.12.16; Sydney (2 Y Barracks)*

Date of Embarkation and Transport: *7.2.17; A.M.S. "Wiltshire"*

Date of Return to Australia and Transport: *14.2.21; A.M.S. "Bahia Bontilla"*

Place, date and nature of Casualty (if any): *Nil.*

Decorations (if any): *General Service Medals*

Full details and remarks as to service:-

*15.12.16 - 22.12.16 - Pte. 1st Coy. 1st Div. 1st A.I.F.*

*Thence Sergeant 1st Coy. 1st Div. 1st A.I.F.*

*20.10.18 - 1st Lt.*

*1.2.19 - 18.7.19 - Lieut. 1st Coy. 1st Div. 1st A.I.F.*

*on disembarkation in Belgium.*

*Service 784 days of which 891 were on actual service.*

*My Coy formed part of the British Army in Belgium and was present with it in Belgium at the Armistice.*

Date of entering upon University Course: *23.3.09* Faculty: *Engineering (1914)*

Date of re-commencing University Course after service abroad: *Nil - graduate*

Scholastic Record:-

*Sydney Grammar School 1903-1908.*

*University (1st of July) 09-1914.*

*Graduation - B.E. 1914*

*Instr. of Civil Engineers (London) 1914*

George E Hall's own Book of Remembrance Research File, G14/12

Hall had joined one of the Railway Operating Companies of the AIF after graduating in Civil Engineering. Lameness in one leg prevented his joining a fighting unit but he was apparently determined to serve in some capacity. Despite having sufficient private means not to need to work Hall joined the Department of the Railways until giving up his position during the depression for someone else. It was at this time that Hall commenced work on the War Memorial Records.<sup>19</sup>

Hall's report, written prior to his going overseas, was dated 14 February 1933. In it Hall recorded his progress with the *Book of Remembrance* and Carillon records. He had examined all the papers relating to the War Memorial and put them in order, destroying those of no further value. Files were being generally reduced and consolidated into two drawers by an otherwise unidentified Miss Lee. Much time was apparently spent in collecting and

indexing published material, including music, relating to the Carillon and carillons generally. Details were given in Hall's report on the draft of the *Book of Remembrance*, including the type of information to be recorded in each entry. A problem was encountered in the lack of complete information on nine hundred individuals but some suggestions for soliciting the information were made. Hall also suggested that Professor Holme was to do the final editing of the work.<sup>20</sup>

Following Hall's departure overseas Mr. Arthur Cousins B.A. (1911) was appointed Acting Honorary Archivist by the Acting Vice-Chancellor, WA Selle.<sup>21</sup> Cousins was a former teacher and headmaster who had retired in 1931 at the age of 65. He had obtained first class honours in history, an interest he continued in both his work on the War Memorial Records and in the three other books on local history he published from 1933 to 1948. In an obituary in the Union Recorder David Macmillan said of Cousins:

*He was that "rara avis" in Australian historiography, the devoted local historian who has a realization of the broader implications of regional developments.*<sup>22</sup>

Cousins also reported to the July meeting of the War Memorial Carillon committee on his work since his appointment, most of which related to obtaining the complete service details of each individual.<sup>23</sup> On Hall's return it was decided that Mr. Cousins be asked to become assistant Honorary Archivist. The two had been working together for some time prior to the meeting of the War Memorial Committee at which this was decided, and they had written to the Committee indicating their intention to continue to co-operate.<sup>24</sup>

The *Book of Remembrance* was published in 1939 following seven years of dedicated and meticulous research by Hall and Cousins. They were based in the room on the first floor of the Tower which was known as the Muniment Room. The Union's war records had been transferred from the Fisher Library to the Muniment Room and was supplemented by additional material collected by Hall and Cousins. In 1941, following the Publication of the *Book of Remembrance*, the records were to be transferred back to the Fisher Library<sup>25</sup>, although this appears not to have happened.

The publication date of 1939 was ironic, coming as it did in the same year as the outbreak of another world war in which members of the University would again be involved. In a letter dated 24 June 1941 Holme informed Cousins that the University had ordered 50 copies of the *Book of Remembrance* and that:

*The Executive Committee (of the War Memorial Carillon Committee) had nominated Mr. Hall and you for appointment as Honorary Archivists in respect of the present war. It is still of the opinion that you two are best qualified for that duty in the whole membership of the University.*<sup>26</sup>

At the Senate meeting in July 1941 a report was received from Professor George F. Sutherland, Honorary Curator of the Sydney University War Memorial, in which he proposed a scheme for the distribution of the *Book of Remembrance*. Sutherland also proposed that the Senate acknowledge the work of Hall and Cousins and express its thanks to them. Sutherland further suggested that the two be asked to continue their work as Honorary Archivists. All these proposals were adopted by Senate.<sup>27</sup>

The Honorary Archivists continued their work compiling records of war service until 1952. In that year Hall died and Cousins was forced to resign after nineteen years work, aged eighty six. He wrote to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor (later Sir) Stephen Roberts tendering his resignation and handing over the records they had accumulated. Cousins stated that he had only been able to work through the kindness of the late Mr Hall who picked him up from home and drove him to the University, where the Union had provided ground floor accommodation for their work.<sup>28</sup>

In his reply to Cousins, Roberts stated that he would ask the Registrar to write again when Senate had considered the appointment of "the University Archivist to replace the late Mr Hall".<sup>29</sup> The matter of a University Archivist was not immediately raised in the Senate, but it was an issue concerning at least one other person in the University Administration.

In June 1953 Cousins wrote again to the Vice-Chancellor having recently been in contact with the Secretary of the Union, Tom Williams. He was concerned to have discovered that nothing had been done with the records which had been left in the care of Williams. Cousins was aware that much work remained to be done on the service records of members of the University who served in World War Two. He also suggested that a copy of the *Book of Remembrance* be placed on a desk in the library and that a book containing the names of those killed in the recent war be prepared and placed along side it. Cousins further suggested that all the records of both wars be "put away in archives at the Library" so that they would be accessible and so that information could be added to them.<sup>30</sup> In memory of George Edward Hall, his widow presented the University with a display case to hold volumes of the *Book of Remembrance*. This case, containing two copies of the book, is held in the University Archives.

The Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor Arthur Dale Trendall, in his reply stated that action had been taken on some of Cousins suggestions. The reply also stated the intention of the Acting Vice-Chancellor to bring the question of the appointment of an archivist before the Senate "at an early date." Should an appointment be made in the very near future Trendall invited Cousins, then aged eighty seven, to acquaint the Archivist with the details of the work done to date.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, while there were other factors influencing the minds of the senior administrators of the University in relation to archives at the time, the role of the Honorary Archivists in keeping the name of the archives in the mind of the Vice-Chancellor cannot be ignored.

Timothy J Robinson  
1999

## Notes

Except where otherwise stated the records are held in the University Archives or the Union Archives. The Union Archives were returned to the University of Sydney Union in 2000 and are under the management of the Union Board Secretary. M.L. refers to the Mitchell Library.

1. University of Sydney Union, *Union Correspondence*, 1911-1913.
2. University of Sydney Union, *Minutes of the Union Board*, 11 July 1913. The position of Honorary Archivist to the Union was revived in 1959 when David Macmillan was appointed Honorary Archivist to the Union.
3. University of Sydney Union, Letter from J. Le Gay Brereton, 2 Feb 1921.
4. University of Sydney Union, *Minutes of Union Board Meeting*, 8 September 1916. The leaflet was titled: Proposed "War Memorials" Section of the Union Archives.
5. *Union Recorder*, 24 July 1924, p. 2
6. Public Library of New South Wales Salary Register, M.L
7. King, CJ "Anderson, Henry Charles Lennox", in Nairn, B. and Geoffrey Serle (Gen. Eds.) *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7 p. 56.
8. Women's College, University of Sydney, *Roll Book*, p. 20, (Women's College Archives); Magazine of the Women's College, No. 18, October 1931, p. 23.
9. Fitzhardinge, MY "The Archive Sense", *Union Recorder*, vol.4. No. 16, 24 July 1924, pp. 2-3.
10. *Ibid.* p. 2.
11. University of Sydney Union, "Sydney University Union Archives as handed over to MY Fitzhardinge, Hon. Archivist, March 1924."
12. University of Sydney Union, Document headed "Union Archives" and beginning "With regard to what should be preserved as Archives of the Union....".
13. John Le Gay Brereton in his report as Assistant Librarian in 1903 describes such a system in the cataloguing of books in the University Library. See: *Assistant Librarian's Report*, 1903 pp. 2-3, (Rare Books Library of Fisher Library).
14. *Union Recorder*, Annual Report Supplement, vol. vi, 12 October 1926. p. ii.
15. Sydney University Union, Report of Meeting of War Memorial Committee, 4 July 1922. In volume of minutes titled *General*.
16. *Minutes of the War Memorial Carillon Committee*, 1 December 1931
17. *Ibid.*
18. *War Memorial Carillon Committee Correspondence*, letter from E. R Holme to GE Hall, 11 February 1933.
19. Obituary, *Union Recorder*, 20 March 1952, p. 2.
20. Report on Book of Remembrance and Carillon Records, attached to *Minutes of War Memorial Carillon Committee*, 7 July 1933.
21. *Minutes of the War Memorial Carillon Committee*, 7 July 1933.
22. Obituary, *Union Recorder*, 6 October 1960, p. 211.
23. *Minutes of the War Memorial Carillon Committee*, 7 July 1953.
24. *Ibid.*, 9 May 1935.
25. War Memorial Executive Committee, letter from E. R. Holme to the University Librarian, 3 March 1941.
26. Personal Archives of George Edward Hall. Letter from ER Holme to A Cousins, 24 June 1941.
27. *Senate Minutes*, meeting 7 July 1941.
28. *General Subject Files* file number 8542, letter from A Cousins to Vice-Chancellor, 7 February 1952.
29. *Ibid.* Letter to A Cousins from SH Roberts, 15 February 1952.
30. *Ibid.*, Letter to Vice-Chancellor from A Cousins, 27 June 1953.
31. *Ibid.* Letter to A Cousins from AD Trendall, 9 July 1953.

# The First Two Archivists, 1954 - 1980

## Introduction

The first full-time professional archivist to be appointed at the University of Sydney was David Neil Stirling Macmillan. A decision of the Senate of the University of Sydney on 3 May 1954 was that he be so appointed, and he arrived to take up his duties on 11 August 1954.<sup>1</sup> The second such appointment was that of Gerald Fischer, appointed on 5 September 1968, and who arrived at the University on 6 January 1969.<sup>2</sup>

## Establishing the Archives

The initiative for the appointment of the first full-time and truly professional archivist at the University of Sydney seemed to have its genesis in a memorandum, dated 8 September 1952, from JD Butchart, an Assistant Registrar, to the Registrar, WH Maze. In the memorandum, Butchart notes that “many of our records have not, in the last century, been preserved as they should have”. Although there had been some archival activity in the past, these operations, he said, had not been concerned with keeping University records.<sup>4</sup>

There seems to have been some elapsed time until the whole matter was again raised by the then Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor Arthur D Trendall, who recommended that the Senate appoint a committee to examine the possibility of appointing an archivist.<sup>5</sup> The committee subsequently met on 22 September 1953, and “unanimously agreed that the services of a full-time Archivist were required and decided to recommend to the Senate that it proceed as soon as possible with the appointment of a full-time Archivist - the salary of this officer to be that of a Lecturer or Senior Lecturer according to qualifications and experience”. The Committee also recommended that the Senate appoint an Archives Committee to advise the appointee, and which should consist of the Vice-Chancellor, the Registrar, and the Professor of History, with power to co-opt.<sup>6</sup>

A small committee was then charged with the task of selecting the Archivist from a field of 33 applicants, the position having been widely advertised in Australasia and overseas. Two candidates were then carefully considered, and the services of the Registrar of the University of Glasgow were engaged to interview both candidates in the United Kingdom. The eventual decision was to appoint David Macmillan.<sup>7</sup>

## David Macmillan

Macmillan certainly came well recommended. His referees included Sir James Ferguson, Keeper of the Records of Scotland, JD Mackie, Professor of Scottish History and Literature at the University of Glasgow,

and Ms Alma Calderwood, an Assistant Keeper at the Scottish Record Office.<sup>8</sup>

David Macmillan was born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, on 9 October, 1925. He was educated at Marr College, at Glasgow University, where he graduated BA and MA, and at the University of Sydney, where he obtained his PhD in 1965, having studied for this degree whilst holding the position of University Archivist.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from his academic achievements, however, Macmillan had quite a varied career, and this must have contributed to the colourful character that he apparently was. He served in the Royal Navy from 1944 to 1947, and thus saw service during the Second World War. From 1949 to 1950, he was Assistant Keeper at the Scottish Record Office, working on documents dating from the 12th to the 19th centuries. In addition, he lectured regularly to students at the University of Edinburgh. From 1950 to 1954, he was engaged in research for his MA, but also worked for the National Register of Archives Committee (Scotland), and was a Lecturer in Further Education in the area of local history.<sup>10</sup>

Macmillan was an archivist with a crusading zeal for the archival profession. He gradually became more and more a spokesman for the then emerging Australian archival profession, particularly in the late 1950's. He must be given some credit for the eventual NSW Archives Act (1960). RF Doust, in his M Lib thesis, implies that he probably wrote, or at least drafted, an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 2 August 1957, calling for an Archives Act.<sup>11</sup>

During 1960-1961, Macmillan was promoted to Senior Lecturer equivalent, and took a year sabbatical leave in the United Kingdom, where he was to carry out research into archival and records management procedures in British universities, and in British records relating to early university development in Australia. Between 1954 and 1959, he published four books and twenty-seven journal articles. He later wrote *Australian Universities* for the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee. In addition, he was involved in advisory work for the Commonwealth Government, several State Governments, the Western Pacific High Commission, and the Government of Fiji. Between 1960 and 1965, Macmillan completed his PhD within the University of Sydney with the title of *The Scottish connection with Australia: emigration, commerce and investment, 1800-1846*.

During these years, he also became prominent in the Business Archives Council, conducted Summer Schools in records anagement, and even acted as an archival consultant to the Colonial Sugar Company.<sup>12</sup> From 1966 to 1968, Macmillan also became involved in a formal teaching programme within the University's Department

of History, and in 1967, for example, delivered twenty-eight lectures and took eighteen tutorials. He became a Fellow of the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1968. This constitutes a prodigious effort, and demonstrates both energy and wide interests.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst there is no doubt that Macmillan was a competent historian, and an accomplished publicist for the fledgling archival profession, it is very difficult to arrive at an accurate assessment of his archival legacy. This is mainly due to a lack of reliable statistics for the fourteen years of his tenure as Archivist. He did produce *Guide to the Records of the University of Sydney, 1849-1960*, which gave a short precis of records held. This gave some idea of the content of the listed records, and was obviously intended as a first step in the production of a general description of holdings. Some of the records listed were in fact copies of State records, and transcripts of documents in the Mitchell Library, and were thus not archives of the University. Unfortunately, it is not possible to get any idea of the scale of holdings during his time at the University, nor are there any statistics of records received during that time. There is no doubt that Macmillan started to acquire some valuable private papers of people connected to the University, those of Edgeworth David, Liversidge and Barraclough, to mention a few. However, there is less evidence of the transfer of official administrative records, which should be the core of any university archives.

In the Minutes of the Archives Committee, there is a memorandum, unfortunately unsigned and undated, which designated some archival activities thought presumably by the Committee to be the most important. In the memorandum, there are such comments as "It is high time that the entire record system of the University was co-ordinated", "a careful destruction policy must be initiated", and, "By preserving its records properly and using them judiciously, Sydney University will not only benefit directly from increased efficiency, but will also strengthen its position in the community". All this implies a very strong commitment to a records management function for the Archivist, whilst throughout the memorandum there is frequent mention of great prestige being attached to a viable archival operation.<sup>14</sup>

Very commendable though all this may be, there is no evidence that Macmillan was ever involved in records management activities within the University's administrative records. The Archives Committee felt, quite early on, that some guidance should be given to University staff regarding the preservation of records, that "a general direction" be issued to all departments to

prevent unauthorised destruction of such records.<sup>15</sup> It is a matter for conjecture as to why such a directive, if ever issued, seemingly had little or no effect. In his Report to the Committee of 19 August 1959, Macmillan had asked if a University By-Law should be introduced by which all records produced in University departments would be deemed University property, but the Vice-Chancellor did not consider it appropriate.<sup>16</sup>

Reference has been made to a lack of reliable statistics for Macmillan's years, and this extends to statistics relating to accessions of records, and to the research use of the archival holdings. It is not possible to calculate the quantum of records taken in from 1954-1968, although it is possible to state, as Macmillan records, that for the period 1963-64, 86 researchers visited the Archives, as did 142 staff and students, and that in 1964-1966, 114 boxes of records of records were received, provenance not specified. In his final report, dated 16 September 1967, Macmillan reported that accessions had not been as extensive as in previous years, that there had been increased use of the records, and that the microfilming of Senate minutes had commenced.<sup>17</sup> However, again there are no statistics available.



*David Macmillan photographed for the Sydney Morning Herald, 1954, Registrar: Newspaper Cuttings, G3/85*

David Macmillan resigned from the University of Sydney in April 1968, to take up a position as Associate Professor of History at Trent University, Ontario, Canada. Little is known of his career there, but he was subsequently appointed to a Chair of History, and died in office on 4 September 1987 aged 61. In a publication of Trent University, a colleague, Professor Gilchrist, is recorded as stating, "Right to the end of his life, David was still studying, writing, and talking about his research plans. He was never petty, he was always concerned with his own grand visions".<sup>18</sup>

## Gerald Fischer

Gerald Fischer was appointed as Macmillan's successor on 5 September 1968, and arrived at the University of Sydney on 6 January 1969. The position had been advertised in March 1968 at Lecturer level, with 7 applicants. It was re-advertised at Senior Lecturer level in June 1968, when it attracted 33 applicants. The Notice of Appointment stated that "Applicants should be graduates, preferably with experience as an archivist or with historical records", a rather ambiguous description. The Information for Candidates set out in more detail the duties to be carried out. The University Archives were defined as the records of the Senate, the Professorial Board, and the Administration; departmental archives, presumably teaching departments; papers of Professors and other persons connected with the University; archives of

Clubs and Societies; and maps, plans, photographs. The appointee was to supervise research, prepare descriptive material and finding aids, mount exhibitions and deliver lectures and talks. The only reference to records management on this occasion was to the desirability of preparing a programme for the organisation and retention of Departmental Archives, and the transfer of a selection of these to the University Archives. The document went on to state, among other things, that one year sabbatical leave may be granted every seven years. This kept the position of Archivist in line with the conditions for academic staff.<sup>19</sup>

Gerald Fischer certainly attracted some glowing comments from referees, one rating him the best archivist in Australia at the time. The Registrar of the day, Hugh McCredie, mentioned to the Selection Committee that Fischer had expressed an interest in records management, and that this would be of considerable use in his department. A comment by a prominent historian at the University at the time reminded the Selection Committee that it needed to decide how much emphasis should be given in considering the appointment to records management duties, and whether the main emphasis in the Archivist's work was to be on reader services or the management of records for administrative purposes.<sup>20</sup> This was a perceptive comment given the apparent lack of involvement in records management work by Fischer's predecessor.

Fischer was a graduate of the University of Adelaide, and began work as an archivist in the Archives of South Australia in 1950. He was appointed Archivist for South Australia in 1960. In 1964, he had taken long service leave in order to study archives work in the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Within a few weeks of Fischer commencing duties, administrative records began to appear in his newly created Accessions register. Accession 14(a), for example, records the transfer of one of the core records series in the Archives, *General Subject Files of the Registrars Office*, and which comprised correspondence files dating from the 1930's and 1940's to 1967, when the series was discontinued. This is still an important series, and consisted of 65 shelf metres of records. Also transferred in Fischer's early months were such central records series as Senate Minutes, and Professorial Board Minutes.<sup>22</sup>

The rapid transfer of these important administrative records to the Archives must be taken as an early vote of confidence in the new University Archivist. Fischer very quickly established control systems over the records being passed into his care. In addition to the Accession register for official records, he soon created a card index to those holdings he had already identified, together with a biographical card index of prominent persons, and the holdings of private papers. By 1972, he had created an Introductory guide, which gave information on types of records held, access restrictions if any, and the level of research assistance given. Within a comparatively short time, given that he was the sole

archivist, he had established a very high level of control over the records.

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of the incorporation of the University of Sydney, Fischer researched and wrote a book entitled *The University of Sydney, 1850-1975*, and which contained many interesting photographs, which by then had been accessioned and fully identified.<sup>23</sup> In 1978, Fischer took study leave from 3 July to 3 November. He visited 27 European and United Kingdom university archival operations, and 17 other research institutions. This constituted a heavy workload for such a comparatively short period of time. He retired from the University of Sydney on 17 November 1980.<sup>24</sup>

Commenting on Fischer's retirement, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor John Ward, paid tribute to Fischer's work over the twelve years he had been the University Archivist, citing as one notable aspect the success he had in persuading many prominent University people to give their personal papers to the archives.<sup>25</sup> Mention has already been made of the amount of official records transfers made in Fischer's time, and they must, of course, be considered as equally, if not more, important than personal papers.

Fischer was involved in many other activities he rightly considered part of his brief as University Archivist. He regularly put on exhibitions utilizing the records held, and began the publication of the Archives in-house magazine, *Record*. This publication was, like everything else written by Fischer, a scholarly work, yet often displaying a dry sense of humour. In 1977, he was elected President of the Australian Society of Archivists.<sup>26</sup> His Presidential Address, *The Clock of History*, delivered at the 2nd Biennial Conference of the Society, gives an insight into Fischer's career as an archivist, his views on the future of the profession, and some perceptive and erudite comments on the appropriate elements of archival professionalism.<sup>27</sup>

## Summary

Each of the first two archivists at the University of Sydney contributed a good deal to the successful operation that is the University Archives of the present day. David Macmillan appears to have been a superb publicist for archives in general, and a historian of some note. There is some evidence that he considered himself a historian first and foremost.<sup>28</sup> Fischer, on the other hand, argued that the archivist's role was to be more the facilitator of research for the historian, and he had definite misgivings about the archivist being involved in current records.<sup>29</sup> Of the two, it has to be said that Fischer appears to have made the greater contribution to the University Archives. He established control over the records very quickly, he produced finding aids, and in most respects the framework of the University's archival holdings, and of the finding aids, in general terms at any rate, still stands today. In all his archival activities, both at the University, and in the archival profession generally, he demonstrated a scholarly

approach to archival work, and with a use of language that always displayed great rigour.

It is pertinent to ask why it was that neither of the first two archivists were encouraged, or even perhaps permitted, to engage in records management within the Central Administration of the University, let alone the teaching departments. In spite of the mention of the desirability of this being implemented each time the appointments were made, there is no evidence of involvement in current official filing systems, as they were then styled.<sup>30</sup> In an unsigned memorandum to the Committee charged with Macmillan's appointment, for example, both administrative filing systems, and those of academic departments, were specifically mentioned.<sup>31</sup> Similar comments may be found in the documentation relating to Fischer's appointment.<sup>32</sup>

In summary, the University of Sydney deserves a great deal of credit for appointing a full-time archivist in 1954, the first such appointment at an Australian university. Each of the first two University Archivists achieved much, both within and without the University, albeit in their own individual ways. The fact that neither involved themselves in current records within the University Administration is perhaps curious, given that it did seem the intention of the University for them to do so. It is, however, indisputable that the foundations for the present University Archives was well and truly laid by the first two University Archivists. The University of Sydney Archives continues to flourish 50 years on.

Kenneth E Smith  
2004

## Notes

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2. Office of the Registrar, *Personnel file* G3/187, Fischer, Gerald
3. *Record*, University of Sydney Archives, 1991.
4. Office of the Registrar, *General Subject Files* G3/13, File 8542, Memo. 8 September, 1952.
5. University of Sydney, *Senate Minutes*, 10 August, 1953
6. University of Sydney, *Senate Minutes*, 6 October, 1953.
7. Office of the Registrar, *Appointment of the Archivist*, G3/194, Report by the Vice Chancellor.
8. G3/158, *op.cit.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Doust, R.F., *The administration of archives in New South Wales*, M Lib Thesis, University of NSW, 1969.
12. G3/158, *op.cit.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. G3/194, *op.cit.*
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21. G3/187, *op.cit.*
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23. Fischer, G, *The University of Sydney, 1850-1975*, University of Sydney, 1975
24. G3/187, *op.cit.*
25. *University of Sydney News*, 28 October, 1980, p.21.
26. *Archives and Manuscripts*, Vol 7 (1), April 1977, p.54.
27. *Archives and Manuscripts*, Vol 7 ( 5)., Nov 1979, pp. 240-251.
28. Transcript of interview, *Biographical File* 905, *op.cit.*
29. *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 7, no.1 April 1977, *op.cit.*
30. G3/194, *op.cit.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*

## Reminiscences: Gerald Fischer, 1969 - 1980

I can perhaps claim an early if tenuous and distant academic association with the University of Sydney through my undergraduate studies at the University of Adelaide when in 1948 and 1949 I attended the history lectures of Professor GV Portus and Latin lectures of Professor JA FitzHerbert. Both men were notable graduates of the University of Sydney in the early 20th century and significant figures in the university tradition of the transmission of learning in Australia. In the 1950s I had some contact with David Macmillan who had been appointed University Archivist at the University of Sydney in 1954 and we met a couple of times – once when he was passing through Adelaide on study leave and once when I was visiting Sydney about 1962. At that time I think his office was in the Botany building in Science Road just across from the Great Hall.

My real association with the University of Sydney began on Friday 9 August 1968 when as an applicant for the position of University Archivist after Macmillan had left I was invited to attend a luncheon being held in the Chancellor's Dining Room in the Union Building.

A number of academic and administration people made up the party which included the Registrar Hugh McCredie, the Deputy Registrar Ralph Fisher, Marjorie Jacobs, Professor of History, John Dunston, Professor of Latin, and the University Librarian Harrison Bryan. I thought this was very civilised and I enjoyed the luncheon: the past, as the saying goes, is another country - they do things differently there.

I must have passed the luncheon test and I took up the appointment right at the beginning of 1969 and was given an office in the third level of the Western Tower of the Quadrangle. It was a pleasant room with glass doors opening onto a kind of balcony looking across the quadrangle but it involved climbing several flights of stairs. It was Macmillan's last office and its furniture had been chosen by him - a small refectory-style table without drawers and an elaborate cabinet, all handsome pieces of the cabinet-maker's art and probably once used in the early days of the University. I quickly obtained a modern desk with drawers but not with that right-angled credenza addition which went only with higher status.

Below the Western Tower and a little above ground level

a mezzanine floor had been constructed at some time perhaps for general storage use but by 1968 served as the University Archives repository. Access to this area was a bit intricate and as I recall involved going through the front of the Examinations Office which was then located in an adjoining building. The repository had a low ceiling and was equipped with some wooden shelving. There were a couple of lead-paned windows that looked down into

the passage-way directly under the Western Tower that led to the Vice-Chancellor's Garden. Faculty, Board and other minutes were prominent among the records I found in this repository and for want of any other reading area Administration officers were allowed to work there unsupervised.

I was also given access to a Strong Room some distance away where the *Senate Minutes* were separately shelved as well as a number of items of historical interest. This responsibility stayed with me throughout my twelve years and I never quite conquered an uneasy sense or claustrophobia that this cell-like room promoted in me. Perhaps it should have made me reflect philosophically on the fortitude of Francois Bonivard the hero of Byron's

poem 'Prisoner of Chillon' who after six years in such a dungeon was yet on release still able to establish the nucleus of a famous collection of manuscripts and books in 16th century Geneva.

The handsome and so-called Muniment Room in the War Memorial Tower was not part of my responsibility although I often wished it was. It would have made a highly appropriate office for an archivist with its fine oriel window and polished wood floor. In the 1930s it housed the records assembled by the Sydney University Union in preparation for the Honour Rolls commemoration of the two world wars. From about 1945 the room was used (I think) by the English Department and the Union records were placed elsewhere. By some chance a few of these Union records remained in the room or nearby and I was able to add them to other Union records already held in the University Archives.

Even at the time of my 1968 luncheon I was able to discuss with the Registrar the question of an adequate repository for the University Archives and he was reassuring on the point. Early in 1969 I was told that space on the mostly unused ninth floor of the Fisher



Gerald Fischer, 1980

Library Stack would be made available for the University Archives and was asked to provide details of the areas of office, reading and shelving needed. The completed facilities were ready for use in June 1969. There were not a great many records to be moved in but their distant and varied locations and the necessity to use lifts slowed the transfer a little.

The ninth floor of the Library Stack was not air conditioned and all the windows were fixed for the day when it would be. I am not certain now whether

simple exhaust fans had been fitted to the upper part of five windows before we moved in or after but any rate such fans did little to improve the ventilation. So I began to press for what might have seemed like the impossible – converting three of the metal framed windows to hopper-like opening windows. Though the Deputy-Principal at the time thought my concern for fresh air might be more psychological than physiological he did support my request for this modification which was in no way disfiguring to the building. Of course, this ventilation aid did not provide proper optimum storage atmosphere for records and eventually even when air-conditioning was installed it was not specifically to archival standards of temperature and humidity control. In my time, the opening windows were not sealed up again and when the air-conditioning sometimes failed or mal-functioned they continued to be at least of some fail-safe advantage.

Archives by their nature are growing operations and perhaps within a year the Central Records Office wished to make a large transfer of files and for this the University Archives just about doubled its size and shelving capacity which might perhaps have given rise to the suspicion that Fischer was empire-building. Perhaps it was only a couple of years more before still more space was needed and while my memory is now a bit hazy about the exact location of the basement areas acquired I think it was on the western side of Eastern Avenue fairly near City Road and it held still more Central Records files. To records here and in Fisher Library Stack, Central Records staff had direct access, subject to a system of loan records to cover borrowings and I recall that my request for pads of triplicate loan forms somehow produced such a quantity that we were perhaps still using them when I left.

While I fully realised that a University Archivist's life would not be all sequestered hours spent in compiling series lists and writing papers on the record group concept, and also that student unrest had been a tradition evening in medieval times, I did not expect the general scene to be

quite as intimidating as it appeared. Some of the largest crowds ever seen on the Front Lawn assembled to protest about the war in Vietnam or specific University issues, buildings were 'occupied' and there was a small flood of student-produced newsletters, notices, posters (a few probably scurrilous), some of which with the help of friends I was able to collect for the University Archives. Front lawn crowds were sometimes swollen by people from other universities or places and then the combined mass would march off down Parramatta Road to join more general crowds at the Town Hall and remain until late afternoon.



*Drawing of Physics Building, Leslie Wilkinson, 1923, P64/3*

Uncertainty about the safety of University records prompted an accelerated programme of microfilming of series of various volumes of minutes and the storage of the films in locations away from the University. Accurate microfilming of any original records calls for particularly rigorous editorial standards if all the peculiarities are to be adequately accounted for and, if necessary, explained in detail. The times, however, did not permit this counsel of perfection to be followed as closely as I would have wished.

Though the times were indeed somewhat unruly and the work of the Administration interrupted briefly and some vandalism occurred, I do not think any serious damage was done to current working records or records lost. The University Archives were not affected in any way. and while I realise that some former student now in maturer years recalling those events my still not agree with me, I still think that the University was fortunate indeed to have the senior administration it did which was able to avoid protest becoming something worse.

## Leslie Wilkinson

Not the least pleasure of an archivist's work is the chance it sometimes offers for meeting interesting people. In 1973 the Vice-Chancellor asked me to arrange an exhibition of some early architectural drawings made by the University's first Professor of Architecture, Leslie Wilkinson, appointed in 1918. This led to me visiting Wilkinson several times at 'Greenway' the Vacluse house he had designed and named in honour of Francis Greenway the pioneer Sydney architect. Wilkinson was now about ninety years old, tall, lightly bearded, in good voice, and still likely to startle hearers with his strongly-held controversial views. Against the background of an open fire-place at the end of the large living room where we sat and talked he looked not unlike a sixteenth century portrait of a Spanish nobleman. Our conversation mainly concerned the form of the exhibition, the number and which drawings were to be

shown, and the preparation of a catalogue. As a young man and the holder of a Royal Academy Scholarship and Gold Medal in England, Wilkinson spent 1904-06 in Italy, Spain, France and England making detailed drawings and sketches of Gothic Classical architecture. In later years he had these drawings mounted and when lecturing to his classes he would hand them around for inspection and comment. His own architectural work while in Sydney included the completion of the Quadrangle and the design and erection of the Physics Building, as well as many examples of domestic architecture. His own house 'Greenway' with light coloured plain walls and shuttered windows he believed was a style much suited to Sydney's and Australia's warm sunny climate.

I asked him about the time needed to complete one of the larger drawings some of which were rendered in colour and he said that if the work was going well he might finish it in a long morning and then relax perhaps over lunch with a glass of the local Chianti. This prompted the presentation to him at the opening of his exhibition on 17 September 1973 of a magnificent long-necked - about a metre - decorative glass container of Chianti, a touch of humour for this occasion which I think he enjoyed.

The exhibition was displayed in the War Memorial Gallery and the opening ceremony was held on the dais of the Great Hall on that evening. I made a tape recording of the proceedings and it is held in the University Archives. It was probably the last public address Wilkinson gave as only a few days later his death occurred unexpectedly.

I attended his funeral service held in the Anglican Church in Vaucluse in the design of which he had played a part. One of the hymns chosen with regard to Wilkinson's wishes was the rousing "Battle Hymn of the Republic".

## Mary David

Although I was aware quite early on of the important collection of Edgeworth David papers that had come into the University Archives before my time, and that a

daughter of David was living still at Waitara, I did not meet this daughter until 1975. What prompted this visit I cannot now recall – perhaps it was some newspaper publicity given to Miss Mary David (better known as Molly) and her singular life style about which she had just published some reminiscences. Perhaps there was also the possibility of some additional David papers still in her possession becoming available.



*Professor Sir Edgeworth David and Lady David (with Rupert the cat) at their home in Hornsby, P11/49. Mary David's house was the adjacent property.*

I drove out on a Friday morning and as I was still not all that at ease with Sydney driving and streets the drive was an adventure in itself. Miss David was then about eighty-five years old, living alone in a vaguely-Spanish looking two-story house of her own design and for which her parents had provided the site out of their larger property. Miss David had lived there since 1928. By 1975 the Hornsby-Waitara area was becoming largely built over but Miss David's large block allowed her to keep several sheep, several goats, guinea pigs, fowls, and to agist the horse of a neighbour. The presence of so many animals meant many flies, the front porch was stacked with bales of hay. She slept outside in all weather on an open upstairs balcony.

She engaged a professional to shear her sheep and she then spun the wool and from

it made some of the clothes she wore. On the subject of spinning she said that she had received some early instruction but did not wish to pursue technique too far – 'I wanted a bit of production' she said. Not far from the spinning wheel there was a television set – she did not reject modern technology. She was something of a feminist, a conservationist, and sometimes expressed rather surprising liberal views. She had graduated in Arts at the University of Sydney about 1907 and has written about those years in her book *Passages of Time*. In the 1920s she became a competent motor-car driver and acted as 'chauffeur' to her father and mother and also to some extent as their secretary. She enjoyed her youthful social life and in later years living in her own house she and friends staged amateur theatricals in the large living room.

I think it was on a Sunday that Miss David invited Gwenda and me to lunch for which she had killed and roasted a chicken and from her own goats milk she made us a syllabub – a sweet curdled with wine and

favoured with spices and something quite splendid in taste and texture. Perhaps it was on this visit that her keen natural history interest which often enlivened her conversation led to a small lecture on funnel web spiders for which she produced a large dead specimen that probably came from her garden and which she spilled on to the table and with surgical tweezers pointed out various bits of the spider's anatomy.

Miss David lived well into her nineties and after I retired we continued a correspondence for some years until her death. Our visits with her were a special please of our Sydney years. I often thought that in appearance she must have greatly resembled her father. It is easy to think that in some field and in different circumstances as a young woman she might well have had a professional career to match that of her distinguished mother and father.

## 125th Birthday Celebrations

In late 1973 the Deputy Principal, Hugh McCredie, asked me to think about preparing a book of illustrations to make the 125<sup>th</sup> year of the Incorporation of the University. Perhaps I undertook this project a little prodigally in terms of the time seemingly available for its completion – the publication deadline was October 1975. From notes I kept at the time I know that much of 1974 had gone before I had made the first selection of photographs and drawings and not until early 1975 were the pictures finally fixed on.

I was able to choose Edwards and Shaw to design and print the book. They had begun as amateur printers about 1939 and after 1945 won a deserved reputation as professional fine printers and discerning publishers. Rod Shaw was a noted Sydney artist, a member of the Windsor Group of painters and a stage designer for Sydney theatres. Dick Edwards was a graduate of the University of Sydney where he studied philosophy, literature and bibliography. Dick Edwards was one of those rare printers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century whose knowledge of classical and modern languages and of grammar was an invaluable part of good book production. Interestingly, as young men about 1939 Shaw and Edwards were both members of the Sydney University Regiment.

The University was fortunate to publish this book when it did for a Commonwealth Book Bounty was then available to Australian printers and this kept the price of the book down to five dollars, well with the reach of undergraduates. The design, printing and binding of the book proceeded intermittently with other work of Edwards and Shaw and involved me in frequent visits to the Sussex Street printery often at the end of the day – once concluding rather excitingly with an exhilarating ride home with Rod Shaw to Mosman. I used to worry about the safety of the original illustrations that I had to leave at the printery since using copies would have meant poor reproductions. But nothing was lost or damaged. There were, of course, last minute problems but some advance copies were bound and available by the end of October – the deadline by a hairs-breadth – though looked upon also as to some degree a commercial publication it was at

least the right time for any Christmas trade. Dealing with Edwards and Shaw was a pleasant experience, enjoying their coffee and tea and learning something about modern printing history in Sydney.

Inevitably there were some errors in the book but only a few I think and as Dick Edwards philosophically observed 'the book that is error free hasn't been printed yet'. I am not sure why review copies were sent to unlikely magazine titles as *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan* and if they published reviews I did not see them. But the book and by implication its compiler did not escape criticism. One newspaper writer seemed aggrieved that there were 'no footnotes' in the book – presumably footnotes for this reviewer were the sine qua non for any University publication, but in a book of pictures the pictures are the text and the captions to them are in effect the longer-for footnotes and these were provided often at length. One academic reviewer was critical of what was alleged to be the "Imperial khaki colour" of the dust wrapper, which seemed to me rather an esoteric quibble.

The edition was a little over five thousand copies and as an official publication its text and copyright belonged to the University.

I greatly enjoyed my years as University Archivist and I still feel gratitude for having received the appointment which, incidentally also allowed me to play a part in helping the archival profession generally.

Perhaps I may also record her my thanks to the people who worked with me – Lorraine Gee, Edith Kirk, and Margaret Taylor. Together I believe we made a useful contribution to the aims and work of the University of Sydney. Nor should I overlook mention of Ursula Bygott and David Wood who were probably our earliest regular and long-time scholarly readers.

Gerald Fischer  
October 2004

## Kenneth E Smith, University Archivist 1980-1997

*Ken Smith was the third University Archivist at Sydney, and the last to hold that title. During his 16 years as University Archivist, Ken led the Archives through some difficult and challenging times, as the higher education amalgamations of 1990 saw a major increase in the Archives' holdings with the acquisition of the records of those institutions. There were also major administrative realignments during those years. Ken very kindly agreed to be interviewed for this anniversary issue of Record.*

Ken Smith was appointed to the position of University Archivist on the 15 December 1980, a position he held until his retirement in 1997. He had undertaken the Archives graduate course at the University of New South Wales as a mature age student in 1974 at a time when graduates were able to pick and choose where to work. Ken's preference was for the academic environment at the University of Wollongong and he worked with the Archivist Baiba Berzins for eighteen months. Then Ken was offered the opportunity to establish the City of Sydney Archives at the Town Hall, where he worked as the sole archivist for four years. As Ken noted in our talk, he preferred the small archives environment, and enjoyed the challenges presented by the Town Hall: "to pick things up off the floor and run with it."

Ken was attracted to the position at the University of Sydney as it enabled him to return to an academic institution. This was very important, because of his great belief in and appreciation of the value of education. Ken always had a "love affair" with universities – and still does. At that time, the position of Archivist was still equated to that of a lecturer or senior lecturer. By 1982, the position was brought into line with Public Service regulations, which entailed a significant change in entitlements.

Reflecting on his years at the University, Ken divided his tenure into two distinct periods. The University in 1980, he said was completely different from what it became in the mid-1990s. From 1980 to 1991, Sydney University was "an enjoyable place to work, a benign place", and senior staff were given considerable responsibilities by the Registrar. The Archivist was categorised as an "Assistant Registrar", and Ken reported directly to the Registrar, who in turn reported directly to the Vice-Chancellor. The Archives didn't have a separate budget until 1991, but could apply for

funding from the Registrar for conservation and special projects. While face to face meetings with the Registrar (first Dr Ken Knight, then Keith Jennings) were infrequent as few problems arose, Ken also sat at the Registrar's monthly staff meetings where he was able to have input into the administrative work of the Faculties.

Over the 1980s Ken oversaw an increase in both the number of staff working in the Archives and the administrative records component of the holdings. While Ken was the sole archivist, he received administrative and archival support from Margaret Taylor who had been employed by Gerald Fischer in 1977. In 1985 Dr Margaret Dwyer, a biochemist and qualified archivist, was seconded to the Archives, and in 1989 Tim Robinson became Assistant Archivist, following the amalgamation of the Sydney College of Advanced Education where he had been employed. "Fancy another archivist?" Keith Jennings reportedly said, announcing this welcome and overdue addition. In the 1990s, a number of casual archivists were employed to assist with descriptive work and database entry, including Marie Alcorn, Andrew Wilson, Samantha Hughes, Patricia Jacobsen, Renata Mancini and Angie Rizakos.

While the numbers of staff increased, the space constraints of the 9<sup>th</sup> Floor of Fisher Library necessitated a selective accession policy. From the start, Ken encouraged the regular transfer of central administrative records, as he believed that the Archives could be vulnerable if it had more cultural than administrative records. With the decentralisation of Central Administration in the early 1990s, the Registrar was no longer directly involved in recording minutes of Faculties, Committees, Academic Board, and Senate, which complicated negotiations with recordkeeping entities and the transfer process.

Ken spent much of the 1980s consolidating and rationalising the holdings, culling duplications and ephemera, and transferring records to Women's College, the Macleay Museum, and Mitchell Library. Such action was necessary to ensure space was available for new accessions. The 1989 amalgamations of the Sydney College of Advanced Education, Cumberland College of Health Sciences, the Conservatorium of Music, and the Sydney College of the Arts, ultimately increased the holdings of the Archives by over 200 metres. Managing



Ken Smith, 1982

the transfers of was a major undertaking, and it took many years before the majority of records came across. However, following the Boston Consulting Group Review of the University's Administration, the period 1992 until his retirement became one of frustration for Ken. He believed the structural changes that were imposed on the Archives misunderstood the nature of professional records work.

Ken felt strongly there needed to be a greater merging of the records and archives sectors of the University at a time when the greater reliance on electronic records was dictating a reassessment of the relationship between current records and archives. In 1995 he wrote a proposal to the Registrar suggesting such a move. While no action was taken at the time, the advent of the *State Records Act* 1998 and its inclusion of the university sector, did in fact facilitate the merger of the two services. Archives and Records Management Services (ARMS) was formed in 2000.

Ken's legacy to the Archives was improving the statistical control over the records and formalising the archival processes. Information about accessions, vacant shelving, users, and items issued was reported in the Annual Report. The statistics provided greater description of series and greater control over the holdings which could be utilised to prove the value of the Archives. This was certainly necessary in the 1990s when the Archives and the University's Administration was under review. Ken developed an Archives Policy in 1981 and introduced more formal processes for the acquisition of records, particularly donation forms addressing copyright and ownership of records. He also designed researcher application forms and policies which are still used.

Ken initiated a number of conservation projects, including the "groundbreaking" use of acid-free paper for Senate minutes. He extended microfilming for extra security and conserved some of the older volumes of Senate minutes. At the time of his appointment in 1980, he described himself as a "modern archivist, keen to release information rather than withhold it"<sup>1</sup>. Ken's personal interest in reference services led him to expand on the finding aids available in the Archives, fully describing many series and producing administrative histories and indexes.

The University Archivist was also expected to promote the sector, and Ken gave some seminars at the School of History where he could directly encourage students in archival research. At the behest of Professor Deyrek Schreder, Departmental Head of History, who believed in exposing his students to archival concepts, Ken gave one seminar on archives each year for some 4 years. He sat on the Action Committee on Local Government Records, and undertook a series of broadcasts at 2SER on Archival practice. Ken had the opportunity a number of times to compare his archival practices with those of overseas Universities. He believes that the University of

Sydney Archives "stacked up fairly well" and it was as good as any he saw in the United Kingdom, which was no doubt due to his rigorous archival methods and sound theoretical approach.

Ken Smith retired in 1997. Tim Robinson wrote in Record at the time: "The bright future anticipated for the University Archives will only be possible because of the years of dedicated work by Ken".

Julia Mant  
December 2004

1. "An Archivist 'Well aware of the here and now'", *The University of Sydney News*, Vol 12/30, 2 December 1980, p. 245

## 50th Anniversary Essay Competition

To mark the 50th year since the establishment of the University of Sydney Archives, an essay competition for students was held with the winner receiving a prize of \$500 for the best original piece of research work based on the records held at the University Archives. Lara Hall, a second year Faculty of Arts undergraduate, was the winner and received her prize at a special afternoon tea the Archives held at the Macleay Museum. Her entry is printed below:



Lara Hall receiving her prize from Tim Robinson, Manager, ARMS

### AP Elkin: Religion and Assimilation

#### Abstract

*AP Elkin is most commonly associated with advocating the policy of assimilation for Australian Aborigines which involved the notion of respecting and building upon Aboriginal religion and culture in order to render them fit for Australian citizenship. Being ordained in the Anglican Church, as well as holding the Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney for twenty-three years, his position is a unique one. An examination of his precepts regarding Christianity reveal that the policy of assimilation is part of the broader framework of his writings on the operation of social mechanisms. Within this dialogue the role of religion and the primary importance of the institution of the Church are evident which shaped the construction of the assimilative Aboriginal person.*

Upon accepting the chair of the department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney at the end of 1933, A P Elkin was undertaking a second full-time job. Having been ordained as a priest in the Anglican Church in March 1916, Elkin had been rector at Morpeth since 1929. For the first four of his twenty three years as Professor of Anthropology, Elkin retained his position at Morpeth, before resigning in 1937 under burgeoning commitments. His work for the church however continued, including membership of the Australian Board of Missions, the Church Missionary Society and being Examining Chaplain to the Bishop and Commissary. The role of Elkin's Christian outlook and views on the institution of the Church have however been given but slight attention in the historiographical examination of his writings on Aboriginal Australians. Elkin's biographer,

Tigger Wise, asserts that "as an anthropologist and a parson, Elkin occupied a unique position."<sup>1</sup> What this unique position constituted is not however explained. A similarly perfunctory reference is given by Ronald and Catherine Berndt, who acknowledge that Elkin's "place in Australian professional Anthropology is unique" one reason being "because of his own particular background and association with the Anglican Church".<sup>2</sup> They do not explore this in any greater depth. This unique position is however worthy of further scholarship as it expressed itself in a profound disappointment in the institution of the Church and a belief in the fundamental importance of religion for unity within society. Such views were instrumental in shaping his belief in a desired policy for Aboriginal people.

Elkin's policy of assimilation is clearly outlined in 1944 in his text *Citizenship for Aborigines*. He asserts the necessity of Aboriginal affairs being undertaken by the federal government, rather than separately by the states, and the formulation of a policy by which the Aboriginal people could become citizens of Australia. This is presented in ten general principles. The fundamental aspects are a recognition of the centrality of group life in Aboriginal society, and a respect for their religious life. It is asserted that "a knowledge of anthropology is essential for all who are concerned in the making of changes in the life of Aborigines".<sup>3</sup> This view is based on the idea that assimilation is not possible by destroying the Aboriginal way of life, but that cultural change must take place in a manner which ensures Aborigines "will not lose their "dreaming" without building in its

place, probably on its foundation, another view of life".<sup>4</sup> This builds on the view that "leading them on and into our way of life, we must share with them our why, our purpose".<sup>5</sup> McGregor comments that Elkin's "efforts deserve recognition as attempts to mediate between, rather than eliminate, distinct cultural traditions".<sup>6</sup> While it is evident that cultural respect is the central tenet of Elkin's approach, the advocated respect is not important of itself. This respect for Aboriginal religion is perceived as essential in order to change their outlook. The aim is to bring Aboriginal people to an understanding of Western ways of thinking.

Elkin's advocated policy of preparing Aboriginal people for citizenship can be examined under the rubric of Andrew Armitage's view on assimilation which entailed a "sociological view of race" which "eroded earlier notions of superiority".<sup>7</sup> This shift in the rhetoric of assimilation from assertions of superiority to acknowledgement of difference is widely attributed to the context of the Second World War, which had the result of assimilation containing the idea of "equality for all Australians irrespective of race".<sup>8</sup> *Citizenship for*

*Aborigines* can be placed in this context as Elkin's views on the manner in which to incorporate Aborigines into White Australia were influenced by the successful way in which Aboriginal soldiers had been incorporated into the army in wartime. Understanding of how such a sociological view arose cannot however be explained by the context of war alone. The study of Elkin's religious views allows for the perception of how this sociological view of race moved to the forefront of his analysis and resulted in this shift in the understanding of assimilation.

Elkin perceives missions as playing an important role in preparing Aboriginal people for citizenship. He outlines a missionary policy in which he comments that "Education, health and gardening, etcetera, are no longer just part of mission activity, ancillary to the evangelical work, but exist in their own right as essential factors in a process of development."<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of a priest this at first glance appears as an interesting comment, especially when followed by his assertion that regarding missionary staff, "never mind how much" they "may love God".<sup>10</sup> It is from such statements that Wise draws the conclusion that regarding missionary policy "the Christianising of the Natives – was given low priority and indeed often countermanded by Elkin's insistence of the right of natives to practice their own religion".<sup>11</sup> This conclusion indicates a fundamental misinterpretation of Elkin's views. Despite the holistic approach to the role of the missions, religion was not

merely advocated as an obscure aspect. This is evident by looking at his commentary on missions.

Elkin's first anthropological field work was undertaken in the Kimberleys from October 1927. While the objective of his research was an understanding of Aboriginal kinship systems an emerging interest in the operation of missions is evident, catalysed by his first visit to a mission at Forrest River. Elkin, in subsequent publications, expresses a failure in the mission's attempt to 'civilise' Aborigines. It is interesting to note that his definition of "civilised" is Aborigines having "in varying degrees forsaken their native view and way of life".<sup>12</sup> Elkin writes of the example of Bard Tribe at the northern end of the Dampier Peninsular, where Roman Catholic Missionaries have worked amongst the Indigenous population for over 40 years. Elkin observed that "in spite of the evangelistic efforts and of the part played by natives in our economic activities, their own culture was still functioning remarkably efficiently."<sup>13</sup>



*Elkin in Western Australia, 1927, P130/18/1*

In his assessment of missions, Elkin reveals what he perceives as centrally problematic. This is the failure of missions in that they have not enabled Aborigines "a real grip of the Christian religion, largely because of the way in which it is usually presented to them".<sup>14</sup> In his note on the Forrest River Mission Elkin looks at the failure of this mission being, in one respect, due to its leadership by Mr. Gribble. His recommendation is that "the Forest Mission requires above all things a man who is a priest through and through".<sup>15</sup> Elkin asserts that in order to allow for the retention of 'civilised' ways amongst Aborigines, missionaries must "build up a view of life which will give them courage for the present and a faith in the future".<sup>16</sup> However, missions have operated around making Aborigines familiar with "economic and material aspects"<sup>17</sup> of white society. While Elkin comments that there are thousands of Aborigines who have been to some degree 'civilised'<sup>18</sup> he introduces the phrase "return to the mat" which describes a state in which Aborigines fall back to their own cultural heritage, whilst retaining a few white practices.<sup>19</sup> Therefore it is evident that it is a philosophical and not material problem that is asserted with regards to mission policy. Religion is the tool for administering "the impression that our way of life is more valuable to them than is their own",<sup>20</sup> which is seen as essential in order to enable a retention of 'civilised' ways. This perception of religion is illustrated when Elkin comments that society must undertake in the future "a search for the truth" which is "the star which Shineth in the East".<sup>21</sup>

The virtue of inculcating Christian values in Aboriginal people is not questioned by Elkin, and missions are posited as necessary institutions in the policy of assimilation. While asserting the necessity of a government regulated approach to missionary activity, Elkin however clarifies that “this reference to Government “visitation” has no bearing on the evangelical work of missions”.<sup>22</sup> Clearly the centrality of evangelical work is still present despite affirmation of the religious nature of Aboriginal mysticism and asserting a need to maintain their religious practices. Ronald and Catherine Berndt express that Elkin’s anthropological work was to be found within a “broader framework of Christianity”,<sup>23</sup> expressing itself in a concern for Aboriginal welfare. Geoffrey Gray similarly posits Elkin as “motivated by a humanitarian concern”.<sup>24</sup> This is a concept which is widely contested, with Ross asserting an acceptance of Aboriginal incorporation into white Australia as one undertaken “grudgingly”.<sup>25</sup> It is not however sufficient to merely account for Elkin’s Christian values as solely manifesting themselves in such a way. Elkin’s discussion of culture reveals a belief in the central role that religion should play in society.

Elkin asserts that anthropologists do not study culture but the “structure and organization of the community”.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting, however, that he asserts that culture is “the activity through which the latter,” being the structure and organization, “expresses and maintains itself.”<sup>27</sup> It is therefore evident that culture plays a pervasive role. Culture is a pattern through which society functions, and tradition is also presented under this conception. Elkin phrases anthropological study as consisting of a “functional and holistic approach to the study of culture.”<sup>28</sup> In distinguishing between culture and social institutions, the latter are denoted as necessities in all society. Though the form may change, there must always be these institutions. Attempts to change institutions are perceived of as dangerous, leading to “disintegration and frequently depopulation”.<sup>29</sup> The disturbance of cultural factors is seen as less destructive, and under this analysis a policy of building western values on those of Aboriginal people is explicable, and reveals a pragmatism with which Elkin is commonly attributed.

Elkin’s understanding of culture is well explained by Russell McGregor when he explains Elkin’s idea that “cultural blending ensured a continuity in the processes of cultural change”,<sup>30</sup> and he describes Elkin’s approach as cultural syncretism. McGregor further notes the influence of “Durkheim’s concept of religion as the social mortar binding together the community”,<sup>31</sup> which is central to this notion of cultural syncretism. Under his analysis McGregor interprets Elkin’s view of assimilation as equipping Aboriginal people with “the cultural capital requisite for effective citizenship in a modern state”.<sup>32</sup> This account of Elkin does not however look at what he considered the modern state should be and therefore how Aboriginal people would take their place in it. By examining Elkin’s view of religion within his own society, which McGregor does not do, a much greater understanding how he formulated a

missionary policy and the manner in which he advocated assimilation is gained.

While Elkin states that the importance of group life needs to be considered for Aboriginal society, he uses such a concept in analyzing his own society, in which he laments a lack of cultural syncretism. Elkin asserts a “breakdown of our own culture as a system or configuration into a hotch-potch”.<sup>33</sup> While McGregor’s comment of a “theme of disenchantment with modernity”<sup>34</sup> running through his writings of the early 1930s is certainly correct, this idea runs much deeper than through just the 1930s when looking at his work outside of Indigenous Australians. This disenchantment colours all Elkin’s writing. He perceives a breakdown of unity in society, and this notion is the central tenet of his wartime speeches published in *Society, Individual and Change*, a text which concerns itself with “the present problem and task of unity”.<sup>35</sup> Elkin uses his anthropological studies of Aboriginal society as didactic of his own society, perceiving a common concern with the social groups and mechanisms. However, regarding his own society he perceives modern “fresh problems” of “individualism of groups”, which has been exacerbated by urbanisation.<sup>36</sup>

With the lament of a lack of social unity, Elkin introduces the discussion of religion in order to account for such a phenomenon. Elkin writes that “a society which is merely secular is, to say the least, on the high road to disintegration”.<sup>37</sup> This view, with an understanding of the role of culture as the force which maintains social institutions, gives a glimpse of the fundamental importance of religion. Religion enacting such a role is perceived in the case of primitive societies. He comments that Aboriginal religiosity, evident in rites, myths, sites and symbols, plays a role in strengthening unity, maintaining respect for morality and above all providing “inspiration for secular life”.<sup>38</sup> This role is seen more widely in primitive food gathering societies in which “religion is not divorced from social life”.<sup>39</sup> Gaynor MacDonald names Elkin as an anthropologist who must take responsibility for having “privileged myth and totemism over economic and social practices” in Aboriginal society.<sup>40</sup> This practice is chastised by MacDonald as she comments that it “disallows the valuing of social or economic relations outside of its framework”.<sup>41</sup> It would however be a mistake to attribute such an intent to Elkin. By giving primacy to the spiritual life, Elkin was not obscuring other facets of life as his perception was that spiritual life encompassed all of society. This is evident in his comment of the religion as providing “inspiration for secular life”.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting that that Elkin finds amongst “primitive people” a cultural syncretism based on religious belief, which is an attribute lacking in his own society. This surely poses an interesting problem for Elkin as his writings are clearly peppered with assertions of western superiority. He talks of “raising primitive races in the cultural scale”,<sup>43</sup> and sees fit to comment that “the question “are the Aborigines the lowest race of mankind?”

is not easily answered".<sup>44</sup> There is however something in Aboriginal society in which Elkin is desirous, or perhaps looks at with a sense of nostalgia. For this reason assertions of inferiority are not fundamental to his conception of assimilation. Glen Ross asserts that Elkin's writings exemplify an inability to come to terms with a black presence in Australia.<sup>45</sup> He explains assimilation, as a policy fostering unity, sought a remedy to the threat Elkin perceived Aborigines posed to civilisation. Placing Aboriginal people as a threat provides an easy means of explaining assimilation. Elkin clearly asserts a Western superiority, but evidence of his writing on white Australian society illustrates that such an account is overly simplistic. Elkin expresses an unease regarding the state of his own society and assimilation can be placed under the entire dialogue of this preoccupation with social unity. Aboriginal assimilation building on a pre-existing spiritual foundation is part of a doctrine to provide social unity through religious instruction. This is mirrored for white Australia. Accompanying his despair at the present state of society he confidently asserts "This patch-work mat, however, is not for us; it is not our cultural heritage, and will not be".<sup>46</sup> As, in regards to social cohesion, "the historic agency for this is the Church",<sup>47</sup> it is perhaps no surprise that the way in which Elkin poses a redress for contemporary problems is through a change to the Church.

A sense of failing on behalf of the institution of the Church, and not just the practitioners on the missions, is evident in Elkin's work. In a letter of resignation to the Australian Board of Missions Elkin attached a Memorandum with recommendations of improving the Board's role. The central argument expressed is that "it seems to me that the thorough and satisfactory carrying out of our missionary effort, using the better methods which we have today, is wrecked on the phenomenon of diocesanism". He further expresses exasperation that "my special qualifications are of no use to the Board".<sup>48</sup>

It is in such a context of dissatisfaction that his interest in Christian unity needs examination. His personal papers contain documents sent to him on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1938 by the Diocese of Newcastle, pertaining to a conference of Bishops in Lambeth in 1920. This document states that God's purpose in the world is for a united fellowship, however "this united fellowship is not visible in the world to-day".<sup>49</sup> The divisions in society are looked upon as an impediment to unity, and the remedy for this is seen to be within the powers of the Church. The paper in conclusion comments that "The time has come, we believe, for all the separated groups of Christians" for "reaching out towards the goal of a reunited Catholic Church".<sup>50</sup> In a letter of May 1<sup>st</sup>, Elkin promises help to the Diocese of Newcastle regarding the objectives stated by 'Lambeth and Re-union'.

The idea of an end to Christian denominations is one heavily taken up by Elkin. In asking the question as to whether the Church will be able to provide the moral basis for his society, which he perceives as lacking, he concludes "it is not likely to be able to do so until it can accept triumphantly the challenge: 'Physician, heal

thyself".<sup>51</sup> He concludes that divisions are "adding to the forces of disintegration in the state and failing to be the social cement and conscience".<sup>52</sup> He further asserts that "this group and socialist age can be won by a Catholic conception of the Church".<sup>53</sup> While Gray comments that Elkin was "trusting the integrity of white people to support the advancement of Aborigines",<sup>54</sup> this trust needs to be seen in terms of potential, rather than perceived as possible by his contemporaries without reform. Aboriginal advancement is caught in his vision of a return to Western cultural tradition, through which the Church is the primary mechanism.

A concern with the outcomes of his writing is perceivable in the historiography of Elkin's assimilation policy. Ross looks at Elkin's policy of assimilation as a "which would accelerate the evolutionary process in favour of white Australian culture".<sup>55</sup> This outcome is also highlighted by MacDonald, which she asserts has results lingering to the present in regards to undermining native title claims. McGregor comments Elkin's "efforts deserve recognition" in their attempt to mediate between the two cultures,<sup>56</sup> and Gray regards Elkin as placing anthropology as an enabling science which influenced government policy.<sup>57</sup> A focus on the influence of his position in the Anglican Church however aims at a history which seeks to understand the manner in which his policy was formulated. In trying to assert such an understanding this has no intent on justifying any condescension or validating an approach which entailed repugnant aspects such as stipulating acceptable circumstances for the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents<sup>58</sup>. The intent is to demonstrate how Elkin's view on assimilation fits into the dialogue of a sociological view on race.

An understanding of Elkin's Christian outlook reveals a philosophy by which the notion of assimilative Aboriginal people has achieved its foundational status. As Joan Scott asserts, historians should engage in "trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive practices by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced".<sup>59</sup> Elkin saw Aboriginal people as inferior in that they did not adhere to a Christian doctrine, but they were rational to the extent that they functioned as a social unit conjoined by religious sentiment, and it was possible for Aboriginal people to be assimilated into white Australia because the Church had the potential of "inculcating in the qualifying citizen those social and moral sentiments".<sup>60</sup> Therefore it is evident that religious belief ascribed a certain identity of the Aboriginal person. An examination of Elkin's religious views, in which the unity of the Church and the cohesive force of Christianity were prevalent, allows for an understanding construction of a policy of assimilation did not focus upon inferiority as the central tool of analysis. It becomes evident that the policy of assimilation cannot however be divorced from his preoccupation with problems he perceived facing white Australia.

Lara Hall  
2004

## Notes

1. Tigger Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p.133.
2. Ronald Berndt, and Catherine Berndt, 'AP Elkin – the Man and the Anthropologist' in Ronald and Catherine Berndt (eds.) *Aboriginal Man in Australia: Essays in Honour of Emeritus Professor AP Elkin*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1965, p.2.
3. AP Elkin, *Citizenship for Aborigines*, Australasian Publishing Co., Sydney, 1944, p.77.
4. *Ibid.*, p.40.
5. *Ibid.*, p.28.
6. Russell McGregor, 'From Old Testament to New: AP Elkin on Christian Conversion and Cultural Assimilation', *The Journal of Religious History* 25, 1(February 2001), p.55.
7. Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1995, p.223.
8. CD Rowley, *Aboriginals in Australian Society*, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh's Third Commonwealth Study Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 1968, p.5.
9. Elkin, *Citizenship for Aborigines*, p.76.
10. *Ibid.*, p.78.
11. Wise, *op cit.*, p.133.
12. AP Elkin, 'Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture', *Oceania* 6, 2(December 1935), p.117.
13. *Ibid.*, p.136.
14. AP Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1938, p.151.
15. University of Sydney Archives: AP Elkin Personal Archives; P130/45, Church papers and correspondence; 5, Correspondence re: Australian Board of Missions: Extracts from Notes on Forrester River Mission.
16. 'Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture', *op cit.*, p.146.
17. *Ibid.*, p.154.
18. *Ibid.*, p.117.
19. AP Elkin, 'Reaction and Interaction: Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia', *American Anthropologist* 53, 1(Jan-March, 1951), p.177.
20. *The Australian Aborigines*, *op cit.*, p.154.
21. AP Elkin, 'Man and his cultural heritage', *Oceania* 20, 1(September 1949), p.27.
22. *Citizenship for Aborigines*, *op cit.*, p.79.
23. Berndt and Berndt, *op cit.*, pp.13-14.
24. Geoffrey Gray, 'Mr Neville did all in his power to assist me'. A.P. Elkin, A.O. Neville and anthropological research in North Western Australia 1927/1928', *Oceania* 68, 1(September 1997), p.32.
25. Glen Ross, 'Dreamtime', whose time? A. P. Elkin and the construction of Aboriginal time in the 1930s and 1940s', *Journal of Australian Studies* 54-55, (1997), p.58.
26. 'Man and his cultural heritage', *op cit.*, p.14.
27. *Ibid.*, p.14.
28. *Ibid.*, p.13.
29. *x*, p.18.
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