

## Saving our memory – new roles of libraries and archives

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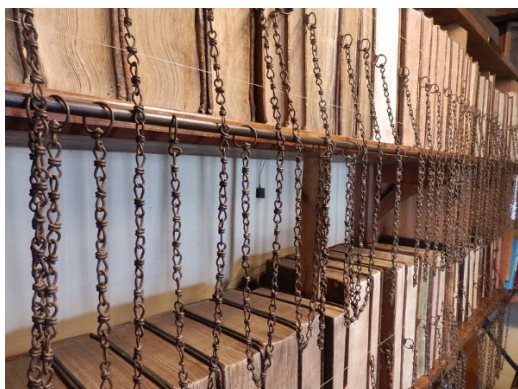
### Introduction

Libraries are places that have always been important to Australians. In 2021 the 1,706 public libraries had more than 56 million physical visits by more than 9 million people. The collections provided access to the worlds knowledge with more than 103 million loans of physical items and more than 43 million digital loans.

Archives are also treasure houses of knowledge with government and university archives holding records of all parts of Australian government, business, trade union, community, university and daily life experiences. The ANU Archives alone holds more than 23 kilometres of unique material, including prefederation trade union minute books that are on the UNESCO memory of the world register.

These wonderful resources record the voices and lives of Australians, be that in publications in libraries or photographs and written (increasingly digital) content in archives.

For most of the history of Australia, the voices recorded in archives and libraries have been only accessible to those that know where the collections are and have the capacity to physically visit the archives and libraries. Our history, indigenous and non-indigenous, has been chained within the institutions echoing the physical chains on early books in European libraries that prevented their loss.



Eric Meyer Chained Library at Minster Church of St Cuthburga, Wimborne Minster

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/etmeyer/28596963441>

The new digital world offers the opportunity to unleash the stories within our cultural institutions. There are however many challenges in making progress that require new skills, approaches and resources to bring to Australians the voices and experiences of those who lived here in the past.

## Collecting and collections

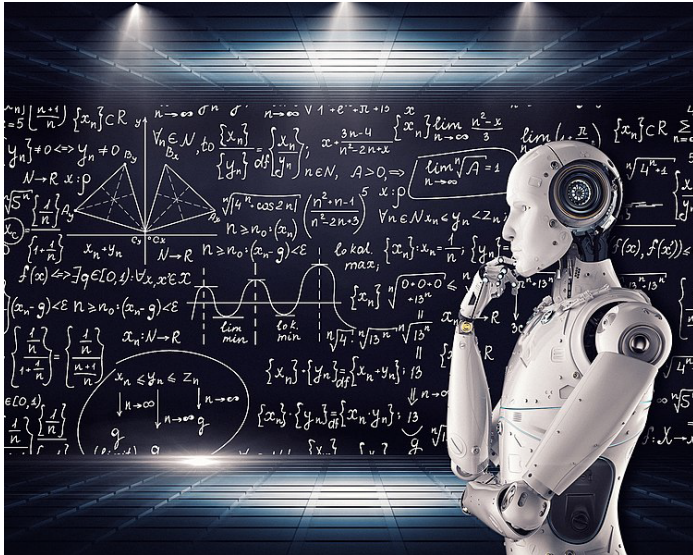
There are extraordinary challenges in documenting and collecting Australian voices. While we think of publications and government records as being well controlled and institutions established to collect and make accessible these works, the stories of Australians, particularly indigenous Australians, are fragmented and often hidden with archival collections. Bruce Pascoe in *Dark emu* calls on settler's diaries and explorers records to tell the story of indigenous agricultural, land management and spirituality that reveals many accepted truths about Aboriginal Australian are manifestly untrue. He revises our understanding of pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians and provides alternative histories that rebut the colonial myths that have assisted in the dispossession of Aboriginals from their lands.

An example of the fragility of collecting is the story of the Wave Hill Station Improvement book, a record of the people (primarily indigenous workers and their families), the activities and management of the station. Wave Hill Station is located approximately 600km south of Darwin in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory. It was established in 1883. Vestey's, a British pastoral company owned the cattle station from 1914 running the station through its subsidiary the Wave Hill Pastoral Co Ltd. In 1954 Vestey's took out the first pastoral development lease for its Wave Hill property. The station is most famous for being home of the 'Wave Hill Walk-off' in 1966, when Vincent Lingiari, a Gurindji spokesman, led a walk-off of 200 Aboriginal stockmen, house servants, and their families from Wave Hill as a protest against work and pay conditions.

The records of the station were destroyed after the walk off with one record book smuggled out. The Wave Hill Station improvements book contains information such as construction costs and materials, plans and photographs of buildings, fences, bores and other structures. It contains the only known record on many of the Aboriginals who worked or lived at the station. Through circuitous pathways it was passed to the ANU Archives and has been digitised giving the descendants access to the stories of their ancestors. You can see the digitised book here <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/272616>. Records of other pastoral leases are also held at the archives.

Sadly, many of the records relating to Aboriginals and other Australians have been lost and we cannot hear their stories or understand our history fully.

In the digital age, collecting is no less complex with the need to capture the digital voices that are written or in audio visual form needing to occur before the vagaries of websites and internet companies disappear or are "cleaned up" by assiduous (and misguided) webmasters. Digital records offer more complexities and need active engagement by librarians and archivists with creators.



Mike MacKenzie Artificial Intelligence & AI & Machine Learning <http://www.vpnsrus.com>

### Curation

Conservation, preservation and managing our collections to ensure that they are cared for to enable future use is an area where constant activity is required.

In recent years the issues faced by those responsible for collections has increased. In Canberra, the ANU and national collecting institutions have experienced the full range of disasters including bushfires, floods, a devastating hailstorm and of course COVID19 which impacted access to collections. For archivists and librarians having the knowledge to deal with disasters and institute recover programs are vital skills. We use the experience from each to build capabilities for the future.

The flood at ANU where approximately 330,000 works were lost from the lowest level of the JB Chifley Library was devastating. It happened in February 2018 and the combination of water more than a metres deep for days, contaminated water from the bathrooms, humidity and consequent black mould meant that collection was not salvageable. Sharing the results of the research into the management of the disaster with other colleagues and building new recovery plans has been shared with librarians across the world to establish better practices in research libraries and archives.



Photos of the aftermath of the flood at the JB Chifley Library at ANU.

A key area for curation is the descriptions (metadata) for collections to assist content to be discovered. Australia is a world leader in creating the framework for describing archives with a

strong education program to provide skills that can be used in large institutions and in small community organisations.

### **Creating new knowledge and access**

The digital world is a book for opening up access to collections. At ANU I have been fortunate to lead a number of projects that have digitised our collections and made them accessible using innovative technology to the Australian community and researchers around the globe.

Our collections are vast – the “secret” collection above the tunnel in Acton has around 16 kilometers of archives dating back to the early 1800s with the remaining 8 kilometers of archives in the D.A. Brown building on campus.



ANU Archives Acton Underhill: Tunnel Vision

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSt24hNwDos&t=147s>

The Library’s main repository in Hume holds around 32 kilometers of resources.



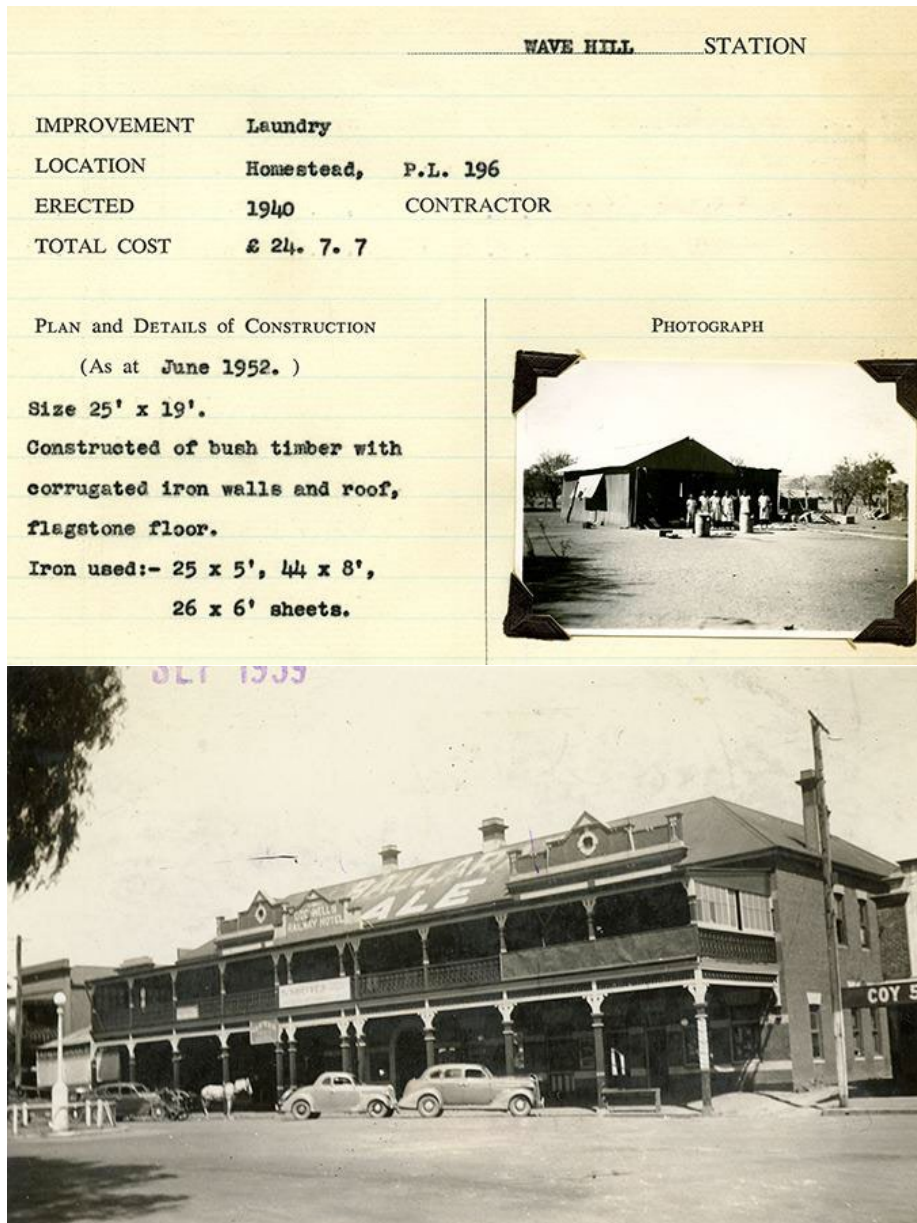
ANU Library Print Repository – 32km of resources!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTtJvIP8dfs&t=69s>

We have digitised a very small but significant part of the collection focusing on material that tells the story of Australians and ANU’s research.

One major project was digitising the “yellow cards” which were created by Tooth and Company with photographs and details taken annually of most of the hotels in New South Wales from the 1920s to

the 1970s. The stories of the people, the local community, architecture, hospitality and local industry have been returned to the community through the project. The resulting website (<https://library-admin.anu.edu.au/toothhotels/>) includes an interactive map and contextual information.



An example of a “yellow card”

Our latest project has been the digitisation of 50 years of the Sydney Stock Exchange records from 1900-1950 containing records covering two World Wars and the Great Depression. The project was very large:

- 70,000 pages
- 100MB TIFF files per page

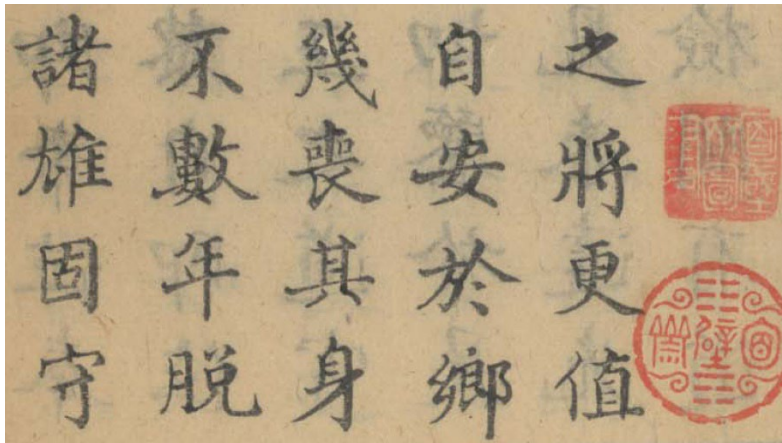
The material in the books were records of the companies, industries and share prices taken 3 times a day when the Stock Exchange was open. We have used Artificial intelligence to convert handwritten and typed text using Tesseract and Textract to create a computational archive that can be used by researchers. Recent analysis by economic historians have led to new insights into the stock

exchange. Papers include *Trading activity and sentiment on the Sydney Stock Exchange 1901-1950* by Grant Fleming, Continuity Capital; Zhangxin (Frank) Liu, University of Western Australia; David Merrett University of Melbourne; Simon Ville University of Wollongong and Harvard University, paper to the Western Australian Economic History Summit 2022 and *Underpricing in a developing capital market: Australian equity issuances, 1920–39* by Grant Fleming, Zhangxin (Frank) Liu, David Merrett and Simon Ville published in *The Economic History Review* Volume 74, Issue 3 p. 831-855.

SHARES		MINING SHARES		GOLD		WEST AUSTRALIA	
NAME	PRICE	NAME	PRICE	NAME	PRICE	NAME	PRICE
<b>TIN - DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN</b>							
Austral Tin	...	Katoa	...	Victorian	...	West Australia	...
Deepeek	...	Deepeek	...	Hustler's Reef	...	Associated	...
Carpathia	...	Carpathia	...	Wilson's Hill	...		...
Carpathia South	...	Carpathia	...		...		...

An example of a page from the Sydney Stock Exchange Register

An internationally significant project was the Xu Dishan Collection portal. The Chinese material from the collection of the eminent scholar and educator Xu Dishan [许地山 (1893-1941)], whose works in literature, religious studies, and the studies of folklorist beliefs are milestones in Chinese literati culture and are still worked on today internationally, was acquired by ANU in 1950. Historian and Professor of Far Eastern History, C. P. Fitzgerald (1902-1992) negotiated the acquisition of the collection. It was the first formed collection acquired by the university. The collection was digitised and made available through a website, <https://library-admin.anu.edu.au/collections/xu-dishan-collection/>, with additional material related to the collection. It is our gift to Chinese scholars and has enabled the English language part of the collection held at The University of Hong Kong to be reconnected to form the whole library of Xu Dishan..



An image from the Xu Dishan collection

### Challenges

Libraries and archive hold the stories of Australian people and our nation. These stories are emerging to be help all understand our history.

The diversity of challenges faced by our institutions in collecting, curating and making these collections accessible are enormous. Australia has been a leader in many ways in using technology to unleash the collections and working towards better disaster recovery and collection practices. These inspire and contribute to better international practice.

We also work with those in the region to assist in the development of skills and provision of tools to assist in managing their collections. I have been privileged to be able to work in Myanmar with University libraries and the Department of Information Studies at the University of Yangon to develop a digitisation training laboratory and continue to provide support and advice.

Fellow Order of Australia Association members can assist in the mission to record and make accessible the story of Australian people. If you have archives or material in your collection that you are interested in sharing, I encourage you to list that material as far as possible and talk to your local library or state or national library, or a university you are associated with. In you are interested in the preservation of material you hold, the International Council of Archives has a very helpful set of resources online (<https://www.ica.org/en/preserving-archives>).

Finally, do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to talk about libraries, archives, or your collection.

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