

Human behaviour and the making of records and archives*

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The human actor behind the activities and transactions which records document and archives memorialize represents an inadequately investigated and theorized aspect of archival studies. With the announcement of a new international archives journal intending to encourage interdisciplinary approaches, it seems appropriate to urge wider investigation.

Some readers may be understandably surprised at the need for such an appeal. Internationally there has been no lack of resolve to tackle complex research and methodical issues which arise in the management of records, especially involving electronic records,

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compliance, standards, accountability, on line access and fostering good recordkeeping regimes. As for the importance of the human context in archival theory, many writers have acknowledged this.¹ Many now also accept that appraisal includes records creation, and that we archivists change values through our multiple mediations of the record. Finally, there is now strong interest in the history of records and archives, including the cultural political and corporate environments in which recordkeeping has flourished. But do we have the bedrock knowledge to account for the existence of records?

What follows is intended simply to introduce the subject, supported by three short Australian case studies, and to point to some of the existing literature and possible lines of development. Here I restrict my discussion to the making of records and formation of archives, while acknowledging that human behaviour is also a factor in records destruction, especially in personal and family settings. I also note, for another time, that 'personality and individual character are an important part of that knowledge about the context of records which the delineation of provenance provides', and of course, individual behaviour has also been relevant to methods and management practices of archives organizations.²

¹For instances of early recognition of this importance, see Frank G Burke, 'The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States', *The American Archivist*, Winter 1981, pp 40-46, and Tom Nesmith, 'From the Editor; *Archivaria* after ten years', *Archivaria*, vol 20, Summer 1985, pp 13-21. One of the earliest writers to highlight the personal dimension of personal recordkeeping was Sue McKemmish in 'Evidence of me...', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 24 no 1, May 1996, pp. 28-45.

²On provenance, see Chris Hurley, 'Problems with Provenance', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 23 no 2, November 1995, pp. 234-259, available at <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/research/rcrg/publications/provenance.html> [accessed 13 January 2007]. On management in organizations, one of the earliest to

Scope and Relevance

How do we account for the existence of records (and thus archives) -- their creation at least, leaving their maintenance and demise to another time? There are two common reactions to such a question. Both responses, unless heavily qualified, are questionable.

The first argues for the predominance, historically as much as in today's global world, of organizational records and the business logic and various legal and cultural requirements which explain their existence and shape. Personal recordkeeping is consigned to the margins, or, as with Jenkinson's explanation for records, not mentioned at all.³ Yet the human factor *within* organizational recordkeeping cannot be ignored, anymore than it can be in personnel management, recruitment, work group formation and so on. Unless officials can be regarded as automatons who always follow correct recordkeeping rules and warrants, we need to recognise what Professor Brooke called 'the human nature of the machine', namely, 'the human factor in the production of documents'. There was, he argued, 'a distinction between traditional bureaucratic or legal routines and the play of human free will and creative activity', and if the student of diplomatic 'forgets the human beings who actually

address the question was Patricia Duam; see 'Records Management and Human Nature', *ARMA Quarterly*, October 1988, pp. 29- 49 [with breaks].

³The rationale for records as a convenient form of artificial memory is explained via a story about 'a manager of a small estate at one end of the scale, the controller of a kingdom's finances at the other'. See Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, Percy Lund, Humphries & Co Ltd (2nd edition), 1966, p 11.

wrote or typed or dictated his documents, he takes leave of the real world which created them.⁴ There is considerable literature to illustrate this truth, recently for example focusing on recordkeeping by scientists and the police,⁵ and from history literature and film we recognise the stereotypical secretary: loyal, diligent and careful with minutes and files.

The second response concedes that organisations *and* people create records, and with the rise of the internet and the global phenomena of blogging, YouTube and Flickr, it is hard to disagree. Rather, it is argued that all manner of historical cultural and social factors can and have come into play which explain personal recordkeeping behavior. Such a list, however, will always be an incomplete explanation, unless personal characteristics and traits are included. As Francesca Jury concluded from her study of the Australian anthropologist Dr Norman Tindale, while 'the factors that make us recordkeepers are real', there is 'no divide between our personality and the social structure that shapes the way we keep records'.⁶ Even so, that personality is our target.

Finally, we should acknowledge the interplay of the personal element in related personal *and* corporate recordkeeping domains, part of what Richard Brown has called 'the discourse of document-making'.

⁴Christopher N L Brooke, 'The teaching of Diplomatic', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol 4 no 1, April 1970, pp.1-9 at p 3.

⁵See Kalpana Shankar, 'Recordkeeping in the Production of Scientific Knowledge; An Ethnographic Study', *Archival Science*, vol 4, 2004, pp 367-382 and Ciaran B Trace, 'What is Recorded is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture', *Archival Science*, vol 2, 2002, pp. 137-159.

⁶Invisible Boundaries: a Paradigm Shift', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 27 no 1, May 1999, pp. 63-73 at p 71.

Their intersections are perfectly illustrated by the creation and keeping of notebooks by Nelson Mandela while imprisoned on Robben Island during South Africa's Apartheid administration, and their confiscation, keeping and eventual return by security policeman Donald Card. They played contrasting but equally courageous documenter roles in different political and bureaucratic cultures, yet the poignant story is not complete without understanding the individual biographies of the two men, Card's involving resignation and death threats during South Africa's transition to democracy.⁷

Grand theorising

The most ambitious explanations for (and conceptions of what are) records and archives take as their starting point a kind of psychic warrant for recordkeeping: all humans more or less need to, and in a sense do, create records or 'records'. Thus, according to Eric Ketelaar 'everybody' is an archivist; to Verne Harris, beyond the dominant traditional archival sliver there is 'orality as a form of archive'; to Jacques Derrida, 'there is nothing outside the text'; to Brian Doyle, language itself represents 'a national archives'.⁸

⁷See Richard Brown, 'Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferra, 1385', *Archivaria*, no 44, pp. 1-43 at p. 30, and *A Prisoner in the Garden; opening Nelson Mandela's prison archive*. Penguin, 2005, especially chapter 3, 'The archival threads connecting two old men'.

⁸Eric Ketelaar, 'Archivalisation and Archiving', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 27 no 1, May 1999, pp. 54-61, and 'Everyone an archivist', in *Managing and Archiving Records in the Digital Era*, Verlag für Kultur und Geschichte, 2006, pp. 9-14; Verne Harris, 'The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa', *Archival Science*, vol 2 nos 1-2, 2002, pp. 63-86; Brien Brothman, 'Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction', *Archivaria*, no 48 (Fall 1999),

Why people make (and keep and destroy records) is a research question which has been around for years, and no better expressed than by Frank Burke 26 years ago when he wrote in *The American Archivist* that archival theory should be based on, inter alia, 'the nature of human organizations, and on humans themselves'.⁹ Burke did not deny that many other factors play their part, but insisted that the human actor should not be overlooked. Conscious of the wide reach expected of theoretical answers, later in the article he asked if human impulses to revere and preserve documents were universal!

Those courageous enough to rise to this challenge have begun by trying to explain the existence of records. Typically, these explanations blend psychology, cultural studies and history.¹⁰ The perfect example is Professor James O'Toole's 1990 Society of American Archivists textbook.¹¹ In the opening chapter, he covers the oral world before writing, and the spread of literacy. He then presented six very common motives or reasons why records are created (personal, social, economic, legal, functional or instrumental, and symbolic). In real life of course, such motives overlap, and they are acted out individually and in corporate settings.

pp. 64-88; and Brian Doyle, 'Respect for Fonts: Linguistic Documentation and Lesser-Used Orthographies,' *Comma*, 2004.1, pp. 77-86 at p 77.

⁹Op.cit., p. 42.

¹⁰At the first international conference on the history of archives and records in Toronto Canada 2003, 'personal documentary behaviour' was strongly in evidence; see Barbara L Craig et al, 'Exploring Perspectives and Themes for Histories of Records and Archives,' *Archivaria*, no 60, pp.1-10.

¹¹James M. O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*. SAA, Chicago 1990. One of his explanations was later expanded into a famous article entitled 'The Symbolic Significance of Archives', *The American Archivist*, vol 56 Spring 1993, pp. 234-255.

O'Toole then identified an additional set of motives explaining why records are kept as archives. This time only three reasons are discussed: practical or pragmatic motives typically involving records made for legal economic or instrumental reasons; a 'just in case' reason, i.e. a hedge against the unknown future; and a non practical reason mixed up with memory and the desire to recollect which links back to the personal social and symbolic reasons for records creation. Taken together, the three reasons are described as the 'impulse to save'.

More recently Professor Barbara Craig's masterly distillation *Archival Appraisal Theory and Practice*¹² has appeared. Following the American historian Carl Becker, she noted that 'everyone is his or her own appraiser' and speculates as to why. In addition to all the obvious reasons of practical necessity, we do so and we have done so for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, we do so 'largely to make sense of our place in the world – in the family, in a profession, and over a life's course'; to 'help us to recall, peacefully and at leisure, the events we cherish or people we knew' as well as to purge the memory and forget embarrassment or misfortune. And secondly, she argued that records are part of our identity, of our inner emotional life; they are a hedge against mortality; and they combine with all other tangible information-bearing objects to shape and enrich us. She ended by noting that the actual motivation for and practice of self appraisal is highly individual and as indecisive as it is deliberate.

¹²Barbara Craig, *Archival Appraisal. Theory and Practice*. K G Saur, Munchen 2004. All quotations are from chapter 1 (pp. 7-22: An overview of appraisal: What is it? Who does it? Why is it done?).

In a new Australian text *Archives; Recordkeeping in Society*,¹³ Professor Sue McKemmish too explains why people create personal records. Drawing on the work of novelist Graham Swift, biographers Richard Holmes and Janet Malcolm, and sociologist Anthony Giddens, she suggested that we create records because, firstly we are, quintessentially, a story telling animal; we have a need to sustain a narrative of self, and we have an urge to witness. McKemmish also tried to explain why people destroy records. Citing Jacques Derrida's writing, she pointed to a drive or passion to destroy the trace.

O'Toole, McKemmish and Craig are typical of writers acknowledging that we should try to provide a generalised theory explaining why records get created and kept. They are self confident and bold explanations for whom Braudel's *longue durée* would be a moment in time, but as a sweeping approach they are by no means peculiar to archival theory. The philosopher Denis Dutton for example has written that 'Throughout history and across cultures, the arts of homo sapiens have demonstrated universal features. These aesthetic inclinations and patterns have evolved as part of our hardwired psychological nature, ingrained in the human species over the 80,000 generations lived out by our ancestors in the 1.6 million years of the Pleistocene.'¹⁴

Like all generalisations, they leave one feeling uneasy and inadequate. For a moment, let us look again at the simple but

¹³Sue McKemmish et.al., eds., *Archives; Recordkeeping in Society*, Charles Sturt University Centre for Information Studies. Wagga Wagga, 2005.

¹⁴See 'Hardwired To Seek Beauty', *The Australian*, 13 January 2007 at <http://www.denisdutton.com/hardwired.htm> [accessed 13 January 2007]

puzzling fact that since we humans began to draw, talk and write,¹⁵ we have been telling stories; so much so in fact that we are, by nature, a story telling animal. This is the novelist Graeme Swift's argument, but has many supporters including psychologists Jerry Bruner and Oliver Sacks and philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. I have no idea if they are correct, though there seem to be equally eminent people who think they are wrong. For instance several years ago the *Times Literary Supplement* philosophy editor Galen Strawson ridiculed what he called the 'Psychological Narrativity thesis'.¹⁶ Right or wrong, archivists would surely need to demonstrate that record making and keeping was a form of story telling, untangle individual and group story creation and transmission, and explain why some people story tell through records, others choose other modes, while others again seem happy to go through life in silence.

¹⁵The historical emergence of speech, writing and records typically receives due acknowledgment by archivists, including classic studies by Jack Goody, Walter Ong, Rosalind Thomas and M T Clanchy. Explanatory strands within these broad themes to account for records, apart from telling stories, include trade and commerce, and government and administration. An Australian instance of drawing is the Burrup Peninsula, a unique ecological and archaeological area on the north western coast of Western Australia which contains one of the world's largest and most important collections of petroglyphs - ancient rock carvings dating back as far as the last ice age. See <http://www.burrup.org.au/> [accessed 3 February 2007]. I thank Joanna Sassoon for this reference.

¹⁶'A fallacy of our age. Not every life is a narrative', *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 October 2004, pp. 13-15. Published on line as 'Against Narrative'. Go to <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/AcaDepts/ld/Philos/gjs/antls.htm> [accessed 15 January 2007].

Categories of individuals

The question posed above ('How do we account for the existence of records...?') could have endless supplementary questions or applications or settings. One could have asked 'Why do people who live in a particular country or belong to a certain profession or corporation or group, or who suffer from an obsessive compulsive disorder, or whose star sign is Virgo, or who pursue a certain hobby create keep and destroy records'? One could scale down from there and try to explain records behaviour between different members of the same profession or corporation. And so on. Impossible, isn't it? Tempted to seek an essentialist explanation for human (records) nature, should we dismiss styles and preferences as mere surface deflections or 'secondary elaborations' influenced by one's social family and cultural environment?

Is it any easier generalising at the individual level? Some people in particular social professional organizational and other groupings and roles (including archivists) have been quite noteworthy creators of records. Some of this has begun to be researched (e.g. diarists and photographers), while much remains to be examined. You will have your own list, but mine includes the recordkeeping behaviour surrounding hobbies such as bird watching, train spotting and scrapbooking; the social role of surrogate archivists; and the irrational self incriminating recordkeeping behaviour of criminals. What patterns emerge? Is the human recordkeeping behaviour exhibited at a particular time, in particular circumstances, by different people and peoples with different personality traits so varied it can not be explained at all? Even in theory? O'Toole observed that 'As in most things, human motivation remains complex', and Richard Brown

agrees: 'There is an enormous complexity to the making and destruction of records'. Will we leave it at that, and resort to a traditional saying from the Yorkshire region of England, 'There's now't so queer as folk'?

It is time to look at three examples from Australia: an auto-archivist Percy Grainger, a collector-archivist Frank Strahan, and a special group of soldiers creating records in special circumstances: as World War II prisoners of war.

*Percy Grainger*¹⁷

Grainger was a pianist, composer and musical innovator born in Melbourne, Australia in 1882; who lived the last two thirds of his life in the US, and died in White Plains, New York in 1961. He demonstrated considerable proficiency and originality in painting and clothing design; and he is remembered for his interest in avant-garde sound experiments with music making machines (in the pre-electronic era); his athleticism; his theories about music, mankind,

¹⁷The standard biography is John Bird, *Percy Grainger* (Sydney Currency Press, Third edition, 1999). A promised more definitive study is in development by Professor Malcolm Gillies. He and Dr David Pear have also edited *The All-Round Man; Selected Letters of Percy Grainger 1914-1961* (Oxford University Press, 1994) and *Portrait of Percy Grainger* (University of Rochester Press, Rochester, 2000). Other important sources are Malcolm Gillies and Bruce Clunies Ross, eds. *Grainger on Music* (Oxford University Press, 1999), Malcolm Gillies David Pear and Mark Carroll, eds., *Self-Portrait of Percy Grainger* (Oxford University Press, 2006), Kay Dreyfus, ed., *The Farthest North of Humanness; letters of Percy Grainger 1901-14* (Macmillan, Melbourne, 1985), and the Grainger theme issue of *Australasian Music Research*, vol 5, 2000 edited by Malcolm Gillies.

personal relationships, sex including flagellation, friendship, race and language; his contribution to the preservation of folk music; and his relationships with his mother, lovers and wife.

He was also one of the few people worldwide to develop an autobiographical museum¹⁸ and archive designed during his own life time, and a perfect example of an 'auto-archivist'.¹⁹

Although Grainger lived in the land of his birth for only 13 years he always strongly identified himself as Australian, and returned for many tours, and never forgot Melbourne's generosity in raising 50 pounds to cover his education expenses when leaving for further study in Frankfurt in 1895. The University, with its Conservatorium, was an obvious location for his museum.

The idea of the Grainger collection and the Grainger Museum has many sources and elements. The general concept of an autobiographical museum relates to his belief that he had the gift of genius, and his awareness of other great men being the focus of museums. Suggestions as to why he acted on this self-awareness include his enlistment in the US Army in 1917 or his marriage in 1928; in any case, reminders of the transitory nature of life and need to make arrangements to preserve one's material memories. The

¹⁸See Belinda Nemeč, *The Grainger Museum in its museological and historical contexts*, Doctoral thesis, 2 vols, University of Melbourne, 2006, especially chapters 3 and 5 which cover the few comparable institutions overseas such as those devoted to the Italian Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863-1938) and the Englishman Sir John Soane (1753-1837), i.e. people who begun *during their lifetimes* to consciously shape their own legacy through recordkeeping and collecting and a 'museum'.

¹⁹See Michael Piggott, 'Grainger the Autoarchivist', in David Pear, ed., *Facing Percy Grainger*. National Library of Australia, Canberra 2006, pp. 39-45.

suicide of his mother in 1922 was perhaps the strongest factor. Grainger had a very close relationship with his mother and on several occasions represented the museum idea as acknowledging the enduring results of her nurturing, in a sense echoing her example in documenting him through such things as his baby cloths, juvenilia, and early press reports.

The aims of the museum as articulated by Grainger variously in the 1930s-1950s embraced early music and folksong and ethnomusicology, but were primarily to illustrate and explain, through a museum-library-archive collection, the achievements of certain late 19C and early 20C Nordic/English composers, including his own. Grainger identified himself strongly with this group.²⁰

Grainger was simultaneously a diligent, meticulous and deliberate recordkeeper. He 'captured' records of and about himself (diaries, letters, photos, autobiographical sketches, self documented sexual activities) into his highly individual recordkeeping systems, and made arrangements with his mother Rose (who managed his business affairs), girlfriend, and later wife to do likewise. He collected material of and about his family and circle, making multiple copies of mss and

²⁰On the Museum today, see <http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/grainger/index.html> [accessed 11 January 2007]. On its origins specifically, see Helen Reeves, *The 'Past-hoard-house': a study of the Grainger Museum*. Graduate Diploma in Material Culture thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1984; and George Tibbits, 'Building the Grainger Museum' in Kate Darian-Smith and Alessandro Servadei, eds., *Talking Grainger; perspectives on the life, music and legacy of Percy Grainger*. The Australian Centre and Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne, 1998, and Naomi Cass, 'Making a museum of oneself: the Grainger Museum', *Meanjin*, vol 59 no 2, 2000, pp. 140-151 at p. 141.

letters, transcribing other people's compositions and recording other cultural materials (folk songs), and managing his own papers including instructing correspondents about dating typing and copying return letters ('one for me & one for the museum'). He was a collector who began very early in life and was astoundingly catholic in taste (he intended even his skeleton to be included in the museum). He was a scholarly and honest documenter too, hence his interest in English and Scandinavian folk songs, arising from musical interest and a concern to preserve a fading cultural phenomenon. He recorded hundreds of folksongs with unusual attention to the authentic dialect and also noting the singer's appearance, personality and environment, and from respect for what today would be termed 'moral rights' (whenever he used a folksong in one of his compositions he specifically acknowledged who had first sung it for him).

Beyond its obvious illustrative use, Percy Grainger's life can be used to open up the whole question of gender and recordkeeping. While no unifying theory exists, there is considerable scholarship on women diarists, women's immigrant shipboard writing, and women's memorializing through records as grieving widows and mothers. Darian Leader, a practicing psychologist in the Lacanian tradition, has theorized about women's behavior for example looking at why they tend to keep wrapping papers from presents and why they write and retain more letters than they post.²¹ Many questions about women and recordkeeping remain: we need studies of delegated

²¹See Darian Leader, *Why do women write more letters than they post?* London, Faber and Faber, 1996. Those looking for a male gender theory could explore the hunt trophy as record idea. See for example Charles Bergman's speculations in *Orion's Legacy; a cultural history of man as hunter*. Plume, 1997.

recordkeeping by what we might call devoted surrogate archivists: wives of writers such as Sidney Webb's wife Beatrice, artist Pablo Picasso's photographer mistress Dora Marr, secretaries of US Presidents such as Nixon's Rose Mary Woods, and mothers with gifted only sons such as Rose Grainger.

Frank Strahan

Referring to Derrida's notion of 'archivization', the Canadian Tom Nesmith wrote of professional archivists that 'Their personal backgrounds and social affiliations, and their professional norms, self-understanding, and public standing, shape and are shaped by their participation in this process'.²² Modern appraisal theory acknowledges inevitable subjectivity, and we see ourselves as co-creators or co-authors actively shaping collective and social memory. Currently however we struggle to generalise about these shaping factors. We seem to acknowledge this more by studying our image in fiction and our personality profile as a profession,²³ rather than providing a theoretical explanation for the putative link between the 'shape of our heads' and the shape of our collections. What we need are

²²Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives', *The American Archivist*, vol 65 no 1, Spring/Summer 2002, pp. 24-41 at p 30.

²³Research on archivists' temperament has been produced in USA Canada and Australia. For an example, see Barbara L Craig, 'Canadian Archivists. What Types of People Are They?', *Archivaria*, no 50 Fall 2000, pp. 79-92. The key Australian writing is Ann Pederson, 'Understanding Ourselves & Others: Australian Archivists & Temperament', paper presented to the 1999 annual conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, available at <http://www.archivists.org.au/events/conf99/pederson.html> [Accessed 15 January 2007]

biographical studies matched with professional typologies and specific collections.

The foundation archivist at the University of Melbourne, Frank Strahan, died on 17 November 2003, the day after his seventy-third birthday.²⁴ He established the University archives in 1960, and served in that post for the following thirty-five years. During that time he built a collection of university, business, trade union and social history archives despite lack of adequate resources including proper storage. Relationships with historians, the business community and later with Trades Hall were forged and a small team of archivists recruited. Many left to establish reputations in related fields, while others, notably Dr Cecily Close and Dr Mark Richmond, served for terms matching Frank's in critical support roles. On the occasion of the first public 'stock take' of their efforts, in 1984, it was described as 'certainly a collection of world importance', comments repeated during another review in the mid 1990s.

In building up the collection, Frank also had support from a Board of Management (and later of Advice) with senior university academics and administrators. They strategically cultivated 'captains of industry' who because of background and experience responded well to ideas about documenting the efforts of business in nation building and wealth creation. Historian-sponsors and others in the then vibrant departments of history and economic history were also helpful.

²⁴For additional details on Strahan, see John Lack, 'Magnificent Obsession', *Ex Libris*, no 41 October/December 1995, p 9; Mark Richmond, '[Obituary] Frank Strahan. Beginnings', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol 32 no 1, May 2004, pp. 14-19; and Michael Piggott, 'Frank Strahan (1930-2003)', *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, vol 35 no 1, March 2004, pp 58-60. Available at <http://alia.org.au/publishing/aarl/35.1/obituaries.html> [accessed 3 February 2007].

In some ways, Frank Strahan was the last of his tribe. There never was, and may never be again, an archivist quite like him, and he would be unrecognisable in the world of today's cultural institution leaders, in style, dress and speech. Judged purely on professional terms, (and there were many other aspects to Frank's life, personality and contributions), he was remarkable. His direct engaging style of approach, ability to communicate enthusiasm for history, and readiness to act decisively when collections needed rescuing, should also be mentioned. He was a natural publicist busy long before the phrases 'public programs' and 'outreach' were coined. He was an old school 'hunter gatherer' who by inclination, necessity and deliberate professional judgment put collection development before documentation.

When a general guide to its collections appeared in 1983, Professor Stuart Macintyre wrote that archivists needed not only Tawney's stout pair of boots, but much more besides.

Their network of spotters must be as vigilant as that of a tow-truck operator, their spiel as persuasive. They should possess the instincts of a magpie, the appetite of a goat, the steadfastness of a zealot in a sea of indifference. In so far as these qualities can be brought together in a single person, they are possessed by Frank Strahan.²⁵

Was Frank more collector than archivist? Anthony Burton wrote some years ago, 'Collections do not form themselves, but are brought together by human agents. If they are more than hotch-potches and

²⁵*The Age* [Melbourne], 3 December 1983, p 17.

have some perceptible shape to them, that will have been supplied by the mind of the collector.’ Burton was thinking of only museum collections²⁶ but can his point apply more widely? Unless we take on face value J H Hudson’s opinion from 35 years ago that ‘Nearly all archivists are instinctive collectors,²⁷ the ‘archivist-collector’ awaits detailed study.

There is no shortage of research, however, arising from ‘hunting the gatherers’ as it has been styled. One strand has developed around psycho-biographies and broader cultural studies showing, for example, that collecting is practised by up to 30% of people in the UK and US. Other scholars such as Professor Randy Frost have focused on ‘hoarding’ as a subtype of obsessive compulsive disorder. Few archival theorists seem to have followed the literature on collecting (Richard Cox being an exception), but I believe it would repay attention. Some recordkeeping can be seen as a form of collecting, and so too can some of our behavior as archivists. In the case of the Australian archivist Frank Strahan, he was a complicated personality whose family life was often fraught, and his childhood experiences of

²⁶See Anthony Burton, [Book review of David Wilson, *The British Museum: a history*], *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol 15 no 2, 2003, pp. 267-270 at p 270.

²⁷Quoted in Richard Cox, ‘The End of Collecting: Towards a New Purpose for Archival Appraisal’, *Archival Science*, vol 2 nos 3-4, September 2002, pp 287-209 at p 306. Cox has also looked at the archives-collecting nexus in ‘Archival Appraisal Alchemy’, paper presented to the Choices & Challenges: Collecting by Museums and Archives symposium, Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, Michigan November 2002, available at

<http://www.hfmqv.org/research/publications/symposium2002/papers/cox.asp>

[accessed 17 January 2007]. For even more on this and, inter alia, archivists’ image in fiction, see his blog <http://readingarchives.blogspot.com/> [Accessed 18 January 2007].

abandonment seem to align perfectly with Muensterberger's ideas of childhood fear of helplessness as an explanation for collecting.²⁸

Australian Prisoners-of-War 1941-42 in the Far East

My third study is not a person, but a record creating type: the POW diarist, the example being certain Australians captured by the Japanese during the Second World War.²⁹ The diaries produced and kept with such risk-taking and ingenuity are one of many examples of the record made *in extremis*.

The keeping of personal records was doubly discouraged. As the Japanese approached, the retreating Allies disabled equipment and destroyed documents including personal diaries to prevent information being captured. But after surrender, their captors had a general suspicion of the practice and a fear the details recorded might be used to support war crimes prosecutions, as indeed some were.

²⁸See Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: an unruly passion: psychological perspectives*, Princeton University Press, c1994. (One should note that his starkly classical psychological approach has not gone uncriticised.) A useful if dated starting point in the face of a vast literature on collecting is John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting*. Melbourne University Press, 1994. On Frost and his research, see

http://www.science.smith.edu/departments/PSYCH/PSYCH1/Faculty_Staff/Randy_Frost/RandyFrost1.htm [Accessed 16 January 2007].

²⁹The most recent popular summary is Cameron Forbes, *Hellfire. The Story of Australia, Japan and the Prisoners of War*. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2005. Two useful introductory academic histories are Gavan McCormack and Hank Nelson, eds., *The Burma-Thailand Railway: memory and history*. Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1993 and Hank Nelson, *P.O.W. Prisoners of war: Australians under Nippon*. Sydney, ABC Enterprises for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1985.

Nevertheless, with some POWs, the determination to record was extremely strong, and the Australian experience of captivity particularly under the Japanese resulted in secret photography, drawings and written accounts. It required great courage, being a summary offence; and even if spared, prisoners caught could face savage punishment. It also took considerable physical effort, patience and ingenuity to find materials and to write and keep diary scraps hidden from searches, in addition to disincentives such as time and weather. POWs certainly did not have 'a room of one's own', nor clean paper, a fountain pen, healthy bodies, rested minds, digital cameras, and dry conditions. On the other hand, these same dreadful circumstances provided part of the reason they wanted to record: to witness, to tell their story, to prosthetically testify.

Even more remarkably, some diarists produced sketches and photographs, and though they worked as individual chroniclers, their group role was acknowledged as that of unofficial war correspondents and protected by the much vaunted and debated code of 'mateship'. Some diary writing in captivity was almost literally a group project. Some men for instance helped fellow servicemen known to be writing a diary to hide it (and radios, cameras and other banned items), and with warnings of imminent searches. A regard for one's mates could work in reverse too: George Aspinall³⁰ deliberately kept his camera and activities as solitary as possible, to avoid the chance of others being forced, through torture, to admit they knew what he was doing.

³⁰Tim Bowden, *Changi Photographer; George Aspinall's record of captivity*. ABC Enterprises and William Collins Pty Ltd., Sydney, 1984. Other diarist POWs such as Ray Parkin were artistically inclined. See *Ray Parkin's Wartime Trilogy*. Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1999.

The deep deep anger at what their mates suffered, as much as what they personally endured, did motivate some diarists too, determined to ensure evidence of war crimes was collected. This sense of mateship is distinctively, if not exclusively, Australian, and has been identified as one of the factors for the higher survival rate in the Far East compared with other Allies in captivity. It is exemplified in the life and diaries of probably Australia's most famous diarist, the soldier surgeon Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop.³¹

Conclusion

As an explanation for records, the 'urge to witness' seems to have wide application to many prisoners-of-war and related contexts such as those involving atrocities and whistle-blowing. As with all general answers however, complication arises from variation and specifics. For example, of the many thousands of POWs who witnessed suffering, only a few made and kept records, only a few wrote down what they all experienced and witnessed. Does the complete explanation involve each individual's health, courage, professional background, rank and ingenuity? What else?

What I think is needed is a development similar to the broadening of the discipline of economics in the later 1970s with the rise of behavioural economics, defined as 'the study of how real people

³¹See Sue Ebury, *Weary; The Life of Sir Edward Dunlop*. Penguin Books, 1995.

Dunlop produced a selection of his diaries as *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop; Java and the Burma-Thailand Railway, 1942-1945*. Penguin Books, 1986.

actually make choices'.³² We might start with the patient compilation of existing research findings analysed with our own framework. We need the insights of anthropologists, philosophers, psychologists, biographers, and economic and cultural and other historians. Our shared assumption should be humanity's humanness. The renowned art historian, the late Sir Ernst Gombrich famously wrote 'There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists', and one is tempted to assert the equivalent for us. Perhaps resorting to a question will suffice, one adapted from Barbara Craig's question 'Canadian Archivists. What Types of People Are They?' which asks: Makers of Records and Archives. What Types of People Are They?

³²For the story of this challenge to neoclassical economics, see Craig Lambert, 'The Marketplace of Perceptions', *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2006 at <http://www.harvardmagazine.com/on-line/030640.html> [accessed 11 January 2007]