

# GENERATORS, GUARDIANS AND GATEKEEPERS:

## THE FUNCTION AND ROLE OF RECORDKEEPING AND THE STATE RECORDS OFFICE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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*"If you don't make mistakes, you're not working on hard enough problems. And that's a big mistake".  
(Frank Wilczek, as quoted in "Cosm", by Gregory Benford, London, Orbit, 1998).*

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### ABSTRACT

As libraries have been the custodians of repositories of knowledge through the printed word, so recordkeepers have been custodians of unpublished corporate records. Those records until recent times have had a clearly definable genesis, discrete physical identity, and management regime. The role and function of the two main players (the archival authority and the agency) have been relatively easily identifiable and capable of being achieved.

In light of technological developments - actual and future - that function needs to be reviewed and re-examined. The role of the recordkeeper in the new millennium must be redefined; the recordkeeping role of the organisation in which the records are created must be clarified; as well as the role of the archival authority that, like the creating organisation itself, has specific legislative responsibilities. The roles must be expressed in terms that are meaningful for corporate management and for the community. They must facilitate the formulation of outcomes for both groups of clients.

This paper explores the above issues in light of the role of the State Records Office (SRO) in ensuring the capture and preservation of the Government's corporate memory. It poses some issues to be addressed over the next few years to ensure that record keeping in the public domain in Western Australia is carried out in a climate of accountability, optimum effectiveness and efficiency - all within the context of appropriate access for the whole community.

### INTRODUCTION

By all accounts, recordkeeping issues in Western Australia are much the same as anywhere else in the western world today. For example, the British Lord Chancellor put out a policy document at the end of 1999 that addresses themes just as familiar to us in Australia as they are in the United Kingdom. (Lord Chancellor's Department, 1999). Corporate plans of other archival institutions in Australia, specifically those of State Records NSW, the Public Records Office of Victoria, State Records of South Australia and the National Archives of Australia reveal and build upon common themes, although the articulation of those themes may differ according to factors to do with the political, economic and administrative environment in which they occur. In the development of this paper, cognizance has been taken of future strategic directions being pursued by such organisations. The State Records Office has always been keen to find synergy with the work of its companion bodies, being conscious of the need for the archival community to identify and build upon standardized practices where they exist.

To assist in setting the context of this paper, a brief word needs to be said about the body responsible for State archives in Western Australia. Various attempts were made before the second World War to bring Government recordkeeping activities in Western Australia into a formal framework. But it was not until the end of the war years that a State archival body was formed. The State Records Office of Western Australia may be said to have had its genesis in that development. The Archives Branch of the then Public Library was established in 1945, surviving and blossoming over the years as part of the State Library (Nind, 1997) until, on 7 April 1999, a name change to the State Records Office was subsequently codified as a legal entity in the State Records Act 2000.

## **FUTURE SCENARIOS**

### **Sourcing the sources: archival reference services**

There was a time when archival reference services in the Western world meant in-depth personal service. Visitors to the Search Room were assured of one-on-one attention, starting with a brief scope interview, followed by a run-down of the agencies and sources required and then, finally, staff keeping an amicable eye on the progress of the researchers as they went about their business in the Search Room. People writing and phoning in with enquiries were often assured of a personal search being done for them, something that could involve hours of work by Search Room staff.

With the boom in genealogical researchers that took off in the late 1970s (a result of the attitudinal change to Australian convict ancestry and, more universally, attributable by some to the publication of Alex Haley's book *Roots*) (Archives Authority of New South Wales, 1983) the above scenario changed. As far back as 1982 at least one State archival authority had imposed restrictions on the servicing of written and telephone enquiries. Practices in reference services vary across the country in respect of the National, State and Territorial archival authorities. At one end of the spectrum the National Archives does not charge for responding to written queries; at the other, two State archival authorities charge by the hour; and, in between, others provide a free service or none at all, preferring to refer all such enquiries to freelance researchers. Today the SRO refers enquirers to freelance researchers if the enquiry is likely to entail protracted research.

Archives in their traditional paper form are not always an easy information source in which to work. Unlike the more direct methodology employed in finding published sources, researchers generally need to trawl long series of records. An enquirer or researcher is lucky indeed if the research path leads to easily-identified sources without the necessity of painstakingly identifying Government organisations responsible for different functions at different times and examining far more irrelevant sources than they would like. To assist in this approach, the SRO has a stand-alone computer system that provides for the series registration method of documenting its archival resources. The public visiting the Search Room has access to hard-copies of the resultant lists. At present it does not have online access.

The commissioning of a fully functional online system with a web interface will correct this situation. When that is achieved, users will more and more find it feasible to search for individual items, although obviously the functional approach will always exist.

If that were all that were needed, our future directions in reference services would be easy. But is that the only requirement? Is it only records in the SRO collection that need to be brought to the attention of our users? There are extensive series of records still in Government organisations that would obviously be of interest to researchers. The records are still "out there" for various reasons – for example they are still in active use; there is no mandatory transfer regime for records under present Western Australian legislation (although the new State Records Act 2000 provides

for a mandatory 25 year transfer regime); some records are of a sensitive nature involving privacy issues; storage space at the SRO is not automatically always available. Are the records to which access will be promoted those which, although on an automated system (here or at the Government agency), are traditional hard copies? Or will we include access to electronic records as well? Are the old friends seated in the search room our only users, or even our main ones?

Automation provides much of the answer to the issues about reference services. Unfortunately, in the case of records, automation raises as many issues as it solves. Electronic records are now created routinely, and the identification and preservation of their archival component has been debated as a critical issue for many years now (Wilkinson & Waugh, 2000). Information professions have agonized over the matter at conferences, in papers, at interminable meetings. Position papers and standards have appeared (Australian Council of Archives, 1996). Worried hands are still being rung. A range of players seems constantly to be wrangling as to the management domain in which the issue really resides, for example, records, archives, or computers.

The truth, surely, is not to be answered by identifying one particular domain or even several of them, but in monitoring the quality of access provided to our customers. In reality, the ideal should not be as difficult for SRO to achieve on behalf of its clients as the above scenario might suggest. It is now a truism that the proliferation of information technology (IT) developments and innovations is resulting in the creation of numerous electronic records systems across Government. In the online environment every electronic database at a Government agency provides the potential for extremely powerful searching mechanisms to be made available remotely for external users. Such databases could be available to visitors to the search room and, more conveniently, for Internet users. Issues here include the levels of access to be available and mechanisms by which those levels will be determined. As Rick Barry has stated, "One of the positive aspects of electronic records is that it is possible, through the use of flags or templates, to use the same record to present in different ways including different levels of metadata access." (Barry, 2000).

Jim Suderman also poses some germane questions:

Will researchers be able to draw together at their research table records in electronic format with those of more traditional media? Will they be able to operate copiers (perhaps a la microfilm printers)? Will archival electronic records be retrieved as physical or intellectual record aggregations (e.g., containers or series), or will retrieval be done at a document (or even more granular) level? Will archival holdings all be on-line or near-line and perhaps accessible via the Web or will the appropriate tapes or disks have to be physically retrieved and the appropriate file(s) uploaded? (Suderman, 2000)

Protocols will need to be formulated in conjunction with Government agencies to ensure that a workable access regime for electronic records operates for the benefit of customers. Considerable liaison with agencies is implied. In a democratic society, where accountability *does* count, it is unthinkable that State and National recordkeeping institutions would arbitrarily erect fences around records in their custody, and thereby limit their clients' access to Government information still held by the agency in question. That position might have done for Hilary Jenkinson in 1922 (Jenkinson, 1922), but it is not the view that can justifiably be perpetuated in the Government environment of the twenty-first century.

The question of providing access to users is one thing, but what of the process whereby the sources are identified, and how appropriate are they for today's world? While specific statistics are not available, the perception is that the academics and post-graduate students who were once such familiar visitors to the search room no longer come in as regularly as they did. It would be interesting to survey the use of primary sources (Government archives specifically) in journal and other learned papers and compare the results with an earlier sample. The impression one gets from professional history and other journals is that citations favour secondary material more and more. In the case of undergraduate students such a trend would be understandable owing to time

constraints and, presumably, a study environment where reference to primary source materials is not a prerequisite. However, for in-depth research the phenomenon is puzzling. Why are academics and post-graduate students not the regular users they once were? Should our rich collections be brought to their attention in different ways? (This issue is addressed more specifically in the section "*If we are the gatekeepers, . . . .*", later in this paper.)

The process whereby records are selected for preservation is generally one of partnership between SRO and the agency whose records are being appraised. Agency personnel are supplied with training and guidelines to enable them to formulate retention and disposal schedules for their records. From the point of view of accountability, of evidential and informational values, the draft recommendations on retention periods proposed by agency personnel are likely to be made with greater confidence than they are for records of potential long-term historical value. Critical input for the latter is provided by consultant archivists working in the State Records Office. The committee that deliberates on the draft recommendations (the Standing Committee on Public Records) brings its own expertise to bear on the process as well, its members representing a good cross-section of experience with records, including their value as historical sources.

To address the issue of dwindling use of primary sources we may need to review fundamentals. Are we ending up with archives that satisfy accountability and evidential factors at the expense of informational content, that is, the sort of information more likely to be of empirical use to researchers? An American archivist, Gerald Ham, addressed the issue of archival selection many years ago, suggesting that archivists were "skewing the study of culture by the studied preservation of unrepresentative indicators of that culture". (Ham, 1967). While new methodologies in records appraisal have been developed (for example, the so-called functional approach) the process whereby archives are identified and set aside from the greater mass of ephemeral records may well need even more drastic re-examination. Thirty years on from Ham's observation, are we seeing the results of the skewing to which he referred?

A recordkeeping consultant has posited a more revolutionary, and ultimately logical, position: "Technology will be able to remove the need for Retention and Disposal Schedules, computer memory is relatively cheap so why not permanently retain the bulk of electronic records ...?" (Murphy, 1999 page 6). Tongue in cheek, yes, but perhaps at least a clue to the way forward!

## **Shifting the Shuffle: the Paperless Office**

Is the paperless office finally on the brink of realization? The term has been in common use for at least thirty years, and office workers and others over the last five years or so have muttered, understandably, that maybe it was after all a pipe dream. But the point has now been reached where it is not sufficient merely to *ask* whether the paperless office is likely to happen. We must actively promote its realization. If we do not, what chance will we have to ensure that we are strategically positioned to *plan* the opportunities that a paperless office will offer?

For the concept to become reality there first needs to be an acknowledgement by Government and CEOs that the notion *is* achievable, and that governance through the paperless office is something well worth promoting.

How will this position be arrived at? Why should CEOs believe that the paperless office is not only highly desirable but eminently achievable? As it is, CEOs are trying to come to grips with a broad duality of record regimes - on the one hand, the management of electronic records produced by technology changing at an exponential speed, and, on the other, conventional paper records and their control systems which themselves more often than not are electronic. CEOs have been hard-pressed to keep up with the many protocols that recordkeeping authorities have issued over the years for the management of conventional paper records. Just as they and their personnel have only comparatively recently come to grips with the plethora of policies and standards in the area, now they must get on top of the many issues and pitfalls associated with a medium which, if news of daily developments is anything to go by, is only in its infancy.

There is anecdotal evidence that CEOs do not necessarily or automatically accept that all electronic records are records in the same way as conventional records. In this respect it is more likely that inchoately they liken the area of electronic recordkeeping to a broad spectrum. Some electronic records clearly are records (for example in terms of Freedom of Information (FIO) and archival legislation) but records on the other side of the spectrum comprise complex and extensive databases that, like a kaleidoscope, change according to the functions demanded of them and the daily snapshots they are required to maintain. How can kaleidoscopic data be regarded as a record? "What part of the kaleidoscope do you want us to keep?" is a valid question. "Why?" and "How?" – are even more valid questions.

Before the paperless office can be achieved there is therefore a formidable psychological hurdle for CEOs to jump. There must be an overarching reason to do business electronically without the irritant of being reminded that the resultant product is a record *per se* whose disposal has to receive executive attention.

In Western Australia the motivation for doing business electronically has been supplied. The Premier has articulated the need very clearly (Court, 2000). Government organisations are on notice that they must move and be seen to move firmly in the direction of delivering services and supplying information electronically. For the first time there is an imperative for the creation of the paperless office not reliant on the initiatives and ideas of the IT industry, administrators and professionals.

In the online world, the external transmission of records is no more dependent upon traditional non-automated mail services than is the creation, registration and distribution of those records around the organisation. "Snail mail" is no longer part of the equation – or, rather, it does not need to be.

Viewed in this way, the scene is well and truly set for the paperless office. That is not to say that workers, in addition to their own PC-created records, will not continue to have their own "working group" papers and files. But it does mean that office systems (including document and records management systems) will be upgraded and mainstreamed to fully automatic, electronic forms. Registries (records offices) will not survive as we know them right now. Just as librarians are having to face the fact that Internet access in a sense makes everyone a librarian, in the new electronic office environment everyone will be a records manager. We need to define the form of the erstwhile records office if archival authorities are to continue to play any part at all in the traditional functions of recordkeeping, for example, management, selection of archival data, and transfer to archival status.

The advent of the paperless office, when completely achieved, will have far-reaching impacts on recordkeepers. For records management systems within agencies, productivity improvements and resource savings will abound; for customers within those agencies, access will be easier and quicker. The benefits for archival authorities will be similar, as it will become commonplace for those authorities to manage archival records in a seamless environment (irrespective of their physical location). The impact of all these factors will have profound implications for the training programs and consultancies delivered to agencies by the State Records Office.

## **The Coachers and the Coached: Enhancing business efficiency and Government accountability through appropriate training**

It has long been a truism that "better records equals better archives". When Theodore Schellenberg published his seminal work in 1956 a watershed was reached in reinforcing the link between the standard of current recordkeeping methods and the extent to which their efficiency and effectiveness led to quality archives (Schellenberg, 1956). More recently, Australian academics and practitioners have formulated fresh approaches to that link and have elicited world-wide attention. Referred to as the records continuum, (McKemmish & Piggott, 1994), the concept

is described as a “consistent and continuous regime of management processes from the time of creation of records ... through to the preservation and use of records as archives.” (Standards Australia, 1996).

Over the last fifteen years or so in Australia the equation has been extended by the development of a nexus between accountability and enhanced recordkeeping performance. The argument has been that Government accountability is enhanced through efficient and effective recordkeeping regimes. That nexus has occupied the minds of academics and record administrators and has been articulated in the reports of commissions of inquiry, at conferences and in journals (Brogan & Phillips, 1994).

Further impetus to the accountability factor may be derived from the Western Australian Freedom of Information Act introduced in 1992. A Government organisation falls foul of that Act if it destroys a record to prevent access to it. Authorized destruction of records in the State may occur only in terms of an approved retention and disposal schedule under the Library Board of Western Australia Act. A Government organisation is therefore expected to ensure that it has such a retention and disposal schedule in place so that it may account for any records destruction that has occurred.

The imperative to enhance business efficiency and Government accountability through its training and consultancy program has been one of the fundamental leitmotifs of the State Records Office for some ten years. Training courses have covered such themes as basic records management systems, thesaurus development and administration, performance indicators and electronic records, to name a few. Over the last ten years some 60 courses have been conducted, with good representation (about 1,300 attendees) from Local, State, and Regional bodies<sup>1</sup>. The quality of courses is evaluated through ongoing assessment of individual questionnaires and annual audited surveys. Current relevance is tested *inter alia* through feedback from membership of professional bodies, user group activities and annual expressions of interest from organisations submitting suggestions to SRO for the next year's training program.

In most cases courses are fully subscribed. The SRO is having increasing difficulty in meeting the demand for those courses it conducts in the metropolitan area. A particular challenge is the need to meet demand in other areas, especially in country areas.

As organisations become more conscious of accountability factors and their significance in providing evidence of good governance, indications are that the demand for training and consultancies will increase. The State Records Act, when implemented, will place even greater demands upon the SRO. Ways of coping with the demand, while maintaining the high standards achieved to date, need to be identified.

An effective way of addressing the issue, and one which presents commercial possibilities for both SRO and the private sector, is to explore ways of outsourcing our training in such a way that the specific requirements and standards of the Government recordkeeping domain are served. In examining this promising strategy, it would be essential to ensure that the policies and standards promoted through the SRO would be expounded and followed up properly by the external providers. We would need to put mechanisms in place to ensure quality control in these and other areas, formal evaluation systems being but one such mechanism. And, fundamental to the concept, we would need to be sure that the existing pool of potential providers – whether in Western Australia or interstate – was large and dependable enough for such a program to be successful and as accountable as it should be.

### **Gunning for the Records : The Case for a Business Archive**

The training courses mentioned above have been available to the private sector for well over a year. The decision to offer them outside Government was based on the premise that the State

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<sup>1</sup> During this time 17 officers attended from firms in the private sector

Records Office sees itself as having a role to inculcate in the private sector an environment conducive to good recordkeeping.

Apart from the general good that might flow from that principle - for example the improvements in business efficiency brought about by better records management systems - the principle of "better recordkeeping equals better archives" would also operate. The scene would then be set for progressing one of the major objectives articulated in *Information and Beyond: Strategic Directions 1997-2001*. Objective 6.4.2 calls for the identification and documentation of WA documentary heritage held external to LISWA (LISWA, 1997, page 44).

For LISWA to play a more active role in the establishment of a business archive, a number of issues need to be addressed. The feasibility of the idea needs to be examined in the context of the "mission" of such a venture. It could be posited that the mission would be to ensure that the corporate memory of business in Western Australia is captured and is made available to the community for informational and research purposes. Business would have a problem with the concept of making their records "available", and the notion would have to be defined very carefully. At what stage would the records become available for public consultation? The answer to that question is difficult enough in regard to Government records; with private sector business archives the issues are more complex, involving as they do commercial confidentiality and other forms of access considerations articulated for example, via the privacy lobby.

We have to be sure of the environment in which we are operating. *If* business records are already being properly looked after, *if* they are being systematically captured and preserved, and *if* there is already some way in which controlled access to their records may be achieved by the community with justified research reasons, then we need not proceed. In the Private Archives Collection of the Battye Library there are runs of some important business records, but nothing like the sort of coverage that would enable LISWA to claim that it has a Business Archive for the State. And, just as significantly, there is no formal liaison program with business and industry to ensure the systematic perpetuation of such a scheme over time. Another aspect of the question is in the general perception that the private sector does not manage its records as systematically as Government. Anecdotal evidence of this has been around for a long time through the reports of records management consultants who work in both areas.

Justifiable motivation for a pro-active approach to business records is that LISWA has a function to educate the community about the heritage value of all records. Business and industry, as key players in the development of the State, should be represented for all time in the archives they have generated, thus giving the public the opportunity of seeing the evidence of their role and the critical part they have played in the development of Western Australia.

If the concept is to progress, what protocols and arrangements will need to be addressed? Organisations like the WA Museum and the Royal Western Historical Society will certainly have views on the matter, and they would need to be followed up. In the case of the Museum, the forging of a formal agreement about collection coverage could be progressed so that when the Museum acquires artifacts of business and industry it will liaise with LISWA about any accompanying records - and *vice versa*.

The form of the Business Archive and the coordination of reference services to it pose interesting questions. Will the archive be in one physical place - logically as part of the Battye Library? The concept of a vast repository with kilometres of records in conventional paper form, with the end users queuing for a seat in an expensive search room is surely one of the past. Far more sensible for the archives to be a virtual one, that is, with records of whatever format available through the Internet.

Exactly what role LISWA would play raises critical questions. While the State Records Office is well positioned to provide training and consultancy services, other issues need to be addressed: for example, the establishment and administration of mechanisms for identifying appropriate archives; resolving copyright and access issues about them; receiving, maintaining and distributing metadata about them via a centralized database; and then, finally, facilitating access to them

through appropriate electronic networks. Is there a role for public libraries, especially ones outside the metropolitan areas whose networks may facilitate the process of identifying local businesses to be targeted? What other bodies may have similar potential to fulfill such a role in non-metropolitan areas? It could well be possible to create partnerships with some of the major consulting firms which provide advice on recordkeeping systems to business firms – effectively combining such a relationship with the outsourcing of training described in the previous scenario.

Models in Australia that offer something along similar lines will need to be examined. An example is the Australian Science Archives Project (ASAP) that does not physically keep records, but promotes and facilitates the process of collection and access. In its own words, it “provides advice on storage, arrangement, and suitable repositories. Wherever possible, ASAP seeks to process collections before transferring them to the repository; however, this is only possible if sufficient funds are available. These funds are sometimes provided by the donors of the records themselves (substantial tax incentives are available to the donors of archives). Alternatively, ASAP will seek funding from other sources, such as trusts or foundations” (Archives of Science and Technology, 2000).

The marketing issues are themselves complex. Businesses will need to be convinced that it makes good sense for their records to be preserved for posterity. They will need to be confident that such a program will provide ammunition for good public relations, and that their image will thereby be enhanced. A simple illustration of that particular point is the way in which brewing firms and cola producers make good use of past images to present new images today.

### **If we are the gatekeepers, why aren't more people coming in?**

While there have been more users of the SRO Search Room over the last few years it is plain that the *balance* of customers has changed<sup>2</sup>. As indicated earlier, anecdotal evidence points firmly to the fact that academics and postgraduate students do not make use of the facilities as they once did. An academic has articulated the current situation as follows: “usage has widened to include more freelance historians/heritage researchers, native title researchers and genealogists ... the explanations for these shifts probably lie in the continued rise of family history research among a widening cross-section of the population (ie not just among ‘the old families’), and the rise of Aboriginal land rights as a major political issue of the late twentieth century and the new millennium. Recent lower usage of the SRO by academics and postgraduate students may be due both to the escalating funding pressures on the tertiary sector that have seen academic staff numbers in history departments decline sharply and teaching workloads increase sharply, as well as to the currently dominant interest in cultural history research (which has led to a great deal more research being undertaken on published texts and proportionately less on archival material)”. In view of the environment described here, is it possible for this “lost generation” of academic researchers to be recaptured?

The use of our services by minors has not been encouraged to date. This is understandable when considering the difficulties of presenting originals of documents to younger children in the Search Room. In fact, current policy discriminates even against older school students – none may have physical access to originals, although they may refer to microfilm versions in the Search Room. The use of educational kits has been used by institutions for years (for a recent example see Carman-Brown & Ditchburn, 1999) and we need to redress this service inequity through such media. But the boundaries need to be pushed even further. If a younger person has a real need to consult an original document, or a series of them, why should that not occur?

The case for providing even more direct experience of records to children – in the classroom itself - is another aspect that should be explored. Already children have the opportunity of examining our seminal constitutional documents on the web (Documenting a Democracy, 2000). One

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1993 the number of search room and written queries in the State Records Office has increased by over 30%.

scenario would be for an ongoing program of hands-on sessions to be presented to a range of schools, linked to relevant aspects of the syllabus if possible, and relating them to whatever SRO records may by that time be available online, or simply to associated Australian records already online like those on Documenting Democracy. In this respect there are exciting possibilities of cooperation with other areas of LISWA and of partnerships with the National Archives and other bodies.

Informal courses on the use of their records is quite common by recordkeeping authorities elsewhere. The State Records Office in its community program has itself presented these from time to time, including country outreach trips in conjunction with the National Archives of Australia. The issue of producing more formal, structured versions of such presentations is one that should be investigated, including the use of online facilities through the Internet. We need to liaise actively with tertiary institutions to encourage greater use from that sector. One way of doing so would be to identify, in conjunction with teaching staff, potential research projects that would rely on a known body of Government archives for their successful completion. Brief courses/tutorials would be presented to research students to enable them to make the best use of the material available – again, using the Internet interactively for the purpose if needed. Publications emanating from such initiatives would themselves spawn greater interest in the records upon which they were based.

Greater use would undoubtedly result from the implementation of a joint search room with the National Archives. The way forward has already been demonstrated by the success of the Melbourne Archives Centre, where records of both the Public Records Office of Victoria and the National Archives are available in one location.

In the present economic climate, the issue of charging for Search Room services will always be around the corner. An argument with which the guardians of official records will always have to contend is along the lines, "Government already pays heavily for the services and the infrastructure that is in place. Why should it not charge people for access to records for which a heavy subsidy has in fact already been paid?" The outgoing Director General of the National Archives recently responded to the issue as follows: "... the right of citizens [should be] to have unfettered access to records in the interests of accountability and open government. Governments in particular are always likely to be dreaming up ways to deny access or at least restrict it. One that you will all be familiar with is the device of charging for access ... There is no respectable argument for doing so in government archives or the archives of public institutions such as universities. It's just another device for restricting access which might be inconvenient." (Nichols, 2000).

Public interest in just about anything can be animated by media coverage, as long as it is skillfully handled. Both in the United Kingdom and in Australia great play is made every year regarding the release for public inspection for the first time of records that have previously been embargoed by the archival authority. Typically these are Cabinet records liberated from the so-called 30-year rule, but there can be others. The State Records Office of Western Australia, which has various series of records in the closed phase, could well emulate its cousins and, in partnership with relevant agencies, host events celebrating the release of such records. For the Government agency, the benefit would be a perception of open Government and good recordkeeping; for users, timely reminders that fresh sources of information are at long last available for that all-important publication, assignment or report.

## **CONCLUSION**

As in other information-based industries, recordkeeping over the next few years will need to address difficult challenges, surmount them, and use the experience effectively to ensure that changes and plans are channeled into imaginative and effective service delivery.

In the phase of current records creation, the State Records Office will be at the forefront of formulating policies, standards, and guidelines. This will enable agencies to be more empowered and confident than ever before in managing their own affairs in the context of whatever information management environments may develop. Management fads will emerge that will require a recordkeeping interface to be engaged or incorporated with them. Just one example in the current management world is the burgeoning area of knowledge management – an area in which the recordkeeping function will need to find its logical place assuming that the knowledge management trend does indeed develop into a recognized and common methodology in agencies.

The appraisal of records will pose greater challenges than ever in two respects. Firstly, from the point of view of the volume of activity consequent upon new recordkeeping legislation and, secondly, in the context of seeking a valid balance between material that clearly must be kept and material that reflects a range of greyness. In the latter case community input and advice will have to be solicited in an ongoing way, just as much as we will need to develop, in concert with Government organisations, new methodologies for large-scale appraisal.

In reference services the State Records Office must harness the power of new technologies, and be imaginative in finding quicker and user-friendlier ways of reaching our customers through this medium. It is in this area, in particular, that opportunities exist for cooperation and partnerships with other bodies - bureaucratic and artificial barriers must be dismantled to ensure the achievement of these.

The general view and conception of the State Records Office as being a “place”, building, or office will change over time. As Terry Cook has expressed it, “ ... in future the archival profession will no longer be defined in terms of the ‘curatorship of physical objects’, but in relation to its knowledge of the ‘conceptual relationships between creating structures, their animating functions, and the resulting records’.” (Cook, 1992).

To that should be added the notion of access for our customers, because it will be against the success of that aspect – in the eyes of Government agencies and community users – that we will be judged. And judged, not only in the short term, but against the long historical perspectives that recordkeeping must serve.

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