

*ARCHIVES: RECORDKEEPING IN SOCIETY* EDITED BY SUE MCKEMMISH, MICHAEL PIGGOTT, BARBARA REED AND FRANK UPWARD. CENTRE FOR INFORMATION STUDIES: CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY, 2005; 347PP, B+W ILLUSTRATIONS, NOTES, INDEX; CLOTHBOUND \$71.50.

Writing about memory is a popular topic for historians. *Public History Review* volume 10 had the title *Remembering and Forgetting*. Historians now recognise museums as memory institutions, with an analytical focus on the exhibition as a representation of contemporary ideas. In order, however, to penetrate the exhibition, the historical processes of collecting, preserving and documenting need to be understood. This kind of archaeology of exhibitions requires a sound understanding of internal institutional processes. To take this further, what is missing in stories historians tell using archival institutions is the purposeful interaction with the histories of that very long food chain of creating and preserving records. Ultimately, historical stories can be enriched through understanding the institutional processes through which historians' 'food' is produced.

If you believe that archives are simply storehouses of raw material, and that archivists are the passive keepers of historical records, then this is definitely the book for you. A whole new world will be opened up. Archival materials and institutional practice are situated firmly within the core of the craft of history, and it can be argued that to undertake sound historical research requires understanding the theoretical framework of archival practice, the processes and power of the recordkeepers and the contexts, functions and nature of the original records. To this end, *Archives: Recordkeeping in society* introduces readers not only to a theoretical understanding of what the raw materials of history *are* and how they come into being, but also the conceptual frameworks which shape what recordkeepers *do* with them. In doing so, this book draws on a wide international archival literature, presenting the arguments in clear and comprehensible prose, through authors who have international reputations.

*Archives: Recordkeeping in society* takes a contemporary cultural approach to archives as memory institutions – that there is no political power without control of the archives. In doing so, it introduces readers to the idea that archival institutions are both products and shapers of their particular historical moment. While Raphael Samuel labelled librarians and archivists 'the poor bloody infantrymen of the historical profession', the authors of this book demonstrate that cultural and political power lies with recordkeepers who adhere to international professional standards and ethics so as to appraise and preserve the *recordness* of records – their authenticity and evidential values. Part of this process, which is explored in several chapters, requires an understanding of the lifecycle of records, and what turns a trace or document into a record and potentially an archive. While the idea that only 'a sliver of a sliver of a sliver of records' created finally ends up in archives and accessible for research may bring gasps from

historians, this book explains why this is necessarily so. Through such understandings it is possible to see that whilst most historians dream that everything will be kept, it is through the judgement of recordkeepers that destruction is professionally managed.

This book is intended as a text for recordkeepers and to this end it is an important and internationally significant Australian addition to the literature, which for the past decade has been led by Canadian thought. The value and reach of this book, however, is much broader than the recordkeeping professions. Through reading this book, record-using professions will be introduced to the social and cultural status of recordkeeping in an engaging and intellectually thorough manner and will gain an entrée into the theoretical underpinnings of the professional practice of recordkeepers. Each chapter can be used as a standalone in teaching, and this is a great strength for educators across recordkeeping and record-using disciplines. Armed with knowledge contained within this book, history students should become better versed in understanding archives and better users of archival materials, particularly during their undergraduate studies. Equally, historians may also become more informed about, and involved with, individual recordkeepers and archival institutions who are such powerful partners in public history.

JOANNA SASSOON  
STATE RECORDS OFFICE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA/  
EDITH COWEN UNIVERSITY