A successful application to the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund in February 2011 allowed the University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) to create an online finding aid to the Wilfred Prest collection, transferred to UMA in the 1970s. The collection has now been listed, repackaged and re-boxed to preservation standards. The list is available online through the UMA website.

One of the features of the collection is the University of Melbourne Social Survey (1941–1943), Australia’s largest non-government survey falling between the two official Government censuses of 1933 and 1946. Conceived and led by economist Wilfred Prest, the survey interviewed a sample consisting of 7300 households occupying 6500 addresses drawn from the Melbourne Directory. Not only did the survey fill a gap in the census, it served as a model for social and economic policy informed by research. The records of the survey preserved in the UMA provide an insight into the history of social surveys as well as a detailed picture of living conditions in wartime Melbourne, especially housing.

From the 1980s, a number of researchers, foremost among them Associate Professor John Lack at the University of Melbourne, used Prest’s data to conduct historical analysis of social conditions. These themes were developed for example by Professor of Australian Studies and History at the University of Melbourne Kate Darian-Smith in her book, On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime (1939–1945), second edition, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2009.

To coincide with the release of the 2011 national census data in June 2012 a small exhibition was installed on the 3rd floor of the Baillieu Library outside the Cultural Collections Reading Room. This display shows Prest’s original survey data in a rich context of related photographs, objects, reports and publications, indicating how personal data and stories are rendered by social science into objective data.

A symposium on 14 June featured speakers from the University of Melbourne including the aforementioned John Lack and Kate Darian-Smith, with Dr Caitlin Stone from the eScholarship Research Centre. Lack’s computer generated data derived from Prest’s survey has recently been archived by the eScholarship Research Centre in the Social Science Data Archive. Layer by layer, the exhibition and seminar explored how social data is collected, analysed, used, preserved and re-interpreted by subsequent generations.

Wilfred Prest was educated in the British social survey tradition at the universities of Leeds and Manchester in the early years of the Great Depression. He taught classes for the Workers Educational Association and lectured in economics at St Andrews University. He came to Melbourne as a senior lecturer in economics in 1938 and introduced this social survey method to Australian economics and social policy. While Prest was not himself an active policy maker he influenced several colleagues in applying academic studies to policy questions and served on several Government committees. Documents from Prest’s archive show his academic influences, interests and achievements.

In the early 1940s Prest engaged mainly women graduates who travelled on foot and public transport to survey...
householders, mainly women at home, while men were at war or work. These women of the University were educated, intrepid and generally sympathetic. The survey covered housing conditions and occupiers’ attitudes towards housing, work and incomes, as well as the sex, ages and relationships of householders. On the back of each individual survey form, comments on the informants’ attitude to the survey was followed by notes on housing conditions, problems, aspirations, school fees, family history, health, marital difficulties, experiences during the depression and hopes for post-war reconstruction, providing a rich and compelling social portrait of wartime Melbourne. Survey forms and records relating to the interviewers give a vivid picture of these doorstop encounters.

The survey was done in two phases, creating a sample of around one in thirty addresses covering the western suburbs and one in sixty addresses for the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. This was followed by a second survey of addresses in the western suburbs drawn from the original sample.

Some respondents were daunted by the interviewers or suspicious of the intentions of the survey, others were only too happy to discuss their situation and concerns. Letters from the respondents in reply to Prest’s invitation to join the survey display the range of responses.

The University of Melbourne Social Survey was mainly funded by the Government Department of Post-War Reconstruction and the Research Committee of the University. However, some Melbourne businesses contributed generous amounts toward Prest’s social survey. These included G.J. Coles & Coy Limited, the Sidney Myer Charity Trust, and a donation that appears to have been made on behalf of Alfred Nicholas of Aspro Limited, whose firm produced the first Australian aspirin.

As the survey drew to a close in 1943, Prest and his male research assistants commenced analysis of the data. This involved coding all of the data collected on survey forms to aid statistical analysis, using tabulating machines to process the data and presenting the data in statistical tables. Due not least to the labour shortage and other commitments of academics during war-time, Prest’s Housing, Income and Saving in War-time: A local survey was only published in 1952, limiting its direct impact on post-war reconstruction policy. Housing was included as a key element of economic policy in post-war planning documents such as the White Paper on Unemployment (1945) by Prest’s colleague and war-time public servant, Richard Downing.

Prest’s collection is supported by a number of other data sets held at UMA that document social and economic conditions in Melbourne and Victoria. A direct descendent is the University’s 1966 survey People in Poverty: A Melbourne survey (1970) by the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

Katrina Dean and Shirin Heinrich
Reading between the Lines

Second year history students studying Australian history in a course taught by Associate Professor Andy May in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies were required to complete an assignment sourcing and using primary source material to interpret its meaning and importance to the historian. The intent was to impart to students the experience and the thrill of finding historical documents and to demonstrate the need for critical evaluation of such documents.

The following extracts from two assignments focus on the use and interpretations of primary source documents. The first, by Alexa Thompson, examines the minutes of the meeting of the Royal Melbourne Dental Hospital Ladies’ Auxiliary held at the hospital on Friday 3 April 1936, and the second, by Brooke Treble, looks at the Ursula Hoff collection and examines both personal and official correspondence between Hoff, Australian artists and Australian and international institutions.

Helen McLaughlin

Royal Melbourne Dental Hospital Ladies’ Auxiliary

Archival material is invaluable for any historian trying to gain a deeper understanding of, and connection with, the past. It can provide details of specific events, as well as insights into broader themes of everyday life in the period being studied. However, the historian must be a detective, critically evaluating a document’s reliability in order to come to cogent, useful conclusions when using primary documents as evidence.

An examination of the content of the minutes immediately creates a sense that socialising was an important dimension of the Auxiliary’s fundraising events. The minutes relate that a bridge afternoon was ‘moved by Miss Doubleday’ and ‘a suggestion was made by Mrs. Wittman’ for a children’s party. Furthermore, a significant portion of the minutes is spent reporting on various correspondences. This contributes to my impression that the Auxiliary was concerned with fostering and protecting a close social network among its members. Finally, reference is made in the concluding comments to ‘afternoon tea’, during which ‘Mrs Tuckfield entertained the members with an interesting and informal talk about her recent American visit’. Clearly, after the formal proceedings of the meeting took place, there was an opportunity to socialise with friends. Although the Auxiliary had an explicit role as a charity, I believe that the popularity of social fundraising events reflects the importance of such organised groups as supportive social networks for women during the 1920s and 1930s.

Ursula Hoff

With a PhD in art history from the University of Hamburg, Ursula Hoff was the first tertiary-educated curator to work in an Australian gallery. Initially, I was keen to find documents relating to Australian artists who had studied at either the National Gallery Art School or the Victorian College of the Arts (before it became a faculty of the University of Melbourne), which is where I came across those of Ursula Hoff.

Some of the most interesting aspects of correspondence in this collection are in the handwritten letters from friends of Hoff, particularly those of local Australian artists John and Helen Brack (nee Maudsley). Even before researching the context of these letters, it is quite obvious that they are exchanges between close friends, as is suggested by the nature of the language used within the letters and their content. Both artists confide in Hoff the challenges they face not only artistically as practising and exhibiting artists, but also professionally. John Brack was head of the National Gallery of Victoria Art School at the time, and he offers a snapshot into the difficulties he faced in his dual position as head of the school and as a practising artist. In his letter to Hoff, he reveals issues surrounding funding, having to perform menial tasks and not having enough time to dedicate to his own artistic work.

The ease with which the Bracks divulge personal reflections and criticisms of the artistic community at the time in Melbourne (‘collectors’ in particular) is fascinating, as it reveals Hoff’s position as one of belonging to that community, even though she was an art historian, not an artist.

A Wealth of Details

Plans, photographs and documents reveal not only Melbourne’s built heritage they also document an aspect of the social history of the city.

In partnership with Open House Melbourne and as part of the University of Melbourne’s Cultural Treasures Festival (28–29 July) UMA has prepared a brochure and exhibition, A Wealth of Details, showing plans, photographs and documents to give further insight into buildings open during the weekend. Research also identified material relating to buildings on the Victorian Heritage Register in addition to those participating in Open House. Staff will begin to upload relevant content to the free Heritage Victoria app, from July, making the Archives’ holdings more widely known to people interested in our built heritage.

A Wealth of Details, ground floor, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne

The Block Arcade: Collins Street wing

The arcade’s name refers to the fashionable late 19th century habit of perambulating the block formed by Collins, Elizabeth, Swanston and little Collins Streets. The site of the Collins Street wing of the Block Arcade, ‘Melbourne’s grandest and most fashionable shopping arcade’ was originally the site of something more humble, Briscoe’s Bulk Grain Store. When Briscoe’s moved in 1883, the George brothers opened a drapery store that was destroyed by fire in 1889. The business reopened further east on Collins Street where it became known simply as ‘Georges’.

Shortly after the fire, David C Askew of the firm Twentyman and Askew was commissioned by the City Property Company Pty Ltd to design an L shaped shopping arcade connecting Collins Street and Elizabeth Street. The featured plan clearly shows the kink in the building that is due to the underlying configuration of land subdivisions.

In 1892 the city of Melbourne was flourishing, and city buildings mirrored the style of those in Europe. The design for The Block is similar to the Galleria Vittorio in Milan, where shoppers had leisure to browse protected from weather and the dust of the streets.

The high quality finishes and attention to detail of the façades and the shopping arcade were carried through to the office levels above. At the time of its opening, the arcade boasted 15 milliners, three lace shops and a photographic studio as well as the first Kodak shop in Melbourne, and the Hopetoun Tea Rooms which is still trading today.

The minutes of the City Property Company, 27 January 1892, record that the directors discussed ‘the desirability of making an effort to secure the completion of ‘The Block’ and to arrange the finances of the company upon a satisfactory basis’. By 1923 the company was in liquidation. The cost of maintenance and incorporation of current safety features is a constant challenge to owners of properties like The Block. Many other arcades established in the late 19th century have not survived or have been altered considerably. In contrast, the Block Arcade has retained most of its original features, and has been extensively refurbished so that it maintains its reputation as one of the places where it is fashionable to be seen and to shop.
The Gothic Bank

The Gothic Bank is the central building in a complex on the corner of Collins and Queen streets, now housing the ANZ bank. It was built in Gothic Revival style for the English, Scottish and Australian Chartered Bank (ES & A) in 1883–87. Designed by William Wardell and commissioned by ES & A general manager Sir George Verdon, the building included a residence for Verdon over two floors above the business. The interiors of both the bank and residence were lavish, as befits a thriving bank in a booming economy.

The buildings either side of the Gothic Bank were both designed by William Pitt and both are linked to land speculator and local personality, Benjamin Fink. Fink sold his land in Queen Street to the Stock Exchange for the Safe Deposit Building project while he was Chairman of the Exchange. The Stock Exchange Building (1890) on Collins Street was an extravagant project and its costs far exceeded the resources of the Exchange, resulting in its sale to the ES & A in the 1923. The Safe Deposit building (1891) is a more restrained interpretation of the Gothic Revival style, built in brick with cement details rather than the more flamboyant sandstone and marble of the Exchange. The Safe Deposit building was the home of The Automobile Club in 1924, at the time the ES & A extended eastwards as seen on a section of city map, shown below. In this year an additional wing was added to the Safe Deposit building and eventually this too became part of the ES & A bank.

Successor to the ES & A, the Australia & New Zealand Banking Group Ltd, undertook restoration and redevelopment of the whole site in 1990–93, building a modern office tower at the rear, connected to the other buildings by a glass-roofed atrium.

Melbourne City Baths

Separate entrances for men and women can still be seen on the façade of the Melbourne City Baths, but many other details of this building have changed since its opening in 1904. At that time, the majority of Melbourne’s population did not bathe at home — the Baths were as much about cleanliness and public health as exercise or recreation. Plans for the building by JF Clark show that all facilities were segregated. A swimming pool, 16 slipper baths, six spray baths and a gymnasium were provided for men and another pool and baths were provided for women. There were also Turkish and vapour baths, a Jewish ceremonial bath and a laundry. Class distinctions were apparent with second class facilities in the basement and first class on the floor above.

Melbourne was known as ‘Smellbourne’ in the late 19th century as water and waste management systems struggled to keep pace with the rapid expansion of population following the gold rushes and in the boom that followed. The 1904 Melbourne City Baths complex replaced facilities opened in 1860.

Facilities began to fall into disrepair in the 1930s due to economic constraints and then due to a reduction in numbers of people living in Melbourne’s inner areas, and by the 1970s the building was threatened by closure and demolition. This threat averted, the distinctive building was refurbished in the 1980s and today provides facilities for a city population that is expanding again.
The Rialto

The Rialto building is now a luxury hotel, but it began as a warehouse and office building, with retail outlets at street level. The Collins Street façade is designed in the distinctive version of the Venetian Gothic palazzo style favoured by boom period Melbournians, and features cement details, ceramic tiles and pressed zinc. Commissioned by businessman Patrick McCaughan in the late 1880s, architect William Pitt utilised the latest in fireproofing for the internal structure, incorporating fireproof floors, stone stair cases, isolated hydraulic lifts, metal strips instead of timber laths to support plaster and full height masonry internal walls.

A growing awareness of the need to preserve all aspects of Melbourne's heritage in the 1980s saw preservation of five levels of urinals at the rear of the Rialto building, and conservation of many other details from past times. The Rialto is just one of a complex of interconnected 19th century commercial buildings through to Flinders Lane, and the relationship between the buildings has been maintained in the current use — the long east facade of the Rialto faces into a void under a glass atrium roof and opposite the former Wool Exchange building (1891) which is finished in a sympathetic style. The floor of the atrium is formed by the original bluestone cobbled laneway, which served the carts and wagons delivering products to the adjacent warehouses.

Early tenants of the Rialto building included the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, responsible for providing Melbourne with a water and sewerage system and the law firm of Theodore Fink, younger brother of notorious lanark speculator, Benjamin Fink. In addition to building plans by William Pitt, the University of Melbourne Archives holds records relating to both Fink brothers and records of one of the Rialto's later tenants, the Melbourne Woolbrokers' Association.


Scots’ Church and Assembly Hall

Presbyterian services were held regularly in Melbourne from 1837, at the west end of Collins Street in a building shared with other denominations. The current Gothic Revival church on the corner of Collins and Russell streets was designed in 1871 by Joseph Reed of the firm Reed and Barnes, and built by David Mitchell, father of Dame Nellie Melba. It replaced a school which from 1841 was also used for church services on this site. A severe storm saw the height of the church spire reduced in the 1960s but it has subsequently been rebuilt to Reed's original design. The Assembly Building was constructed just before WWI, also in the Gothic Revival style to complement the neighbouring church. It is on the site of an earlier Manse and was originally three stories high, with a fourth story added in 1935.

The two architects of the Scots Church complex were equally comfortable with works on paper as they were with brick and stone as seen in the items featured on the panel.

Joseph Reed enlivened his building plans with watercolour, representing not only the colour of building materials but also the effect of light and shadow on building elements. Reed and Barnes designed many other well known Melbourne buildings including Wilson Hall, Melbourne Town Hall, The State Library of Victoria, Rippon Lea and the International Exhibition Building (now known as the Royal Exhibition Building). The Royal Exhibition Building has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List of cultural sites.

From an early age, Henry H. Kemp had intended to be an artist, and undertook sketching tours alongside his architectural studies. En route to Australia in 1886, he rendered scenes on board ship in delicate pencil, plotted his journey on a chart and kept a diary.

On arrival in Melbourne, Kemp joined the practice of Terry Oakden, later Oakden, Addison & Kemp, and worked on a number of major projects including Queen's College at the University of Melbourne. He is best known for his later domestic designs in the Federation style with partner Beverley Ussher. After Usher's death in 1908, Kemp worked alone until forming a partnership with George Inskip from 1911–1913. After WWI, Kemp worked in partnership with his nephew, F. Bruce Kemp.

Scots’ Church and Assembly Hall
Sidney Myer Music Bowl

The Sidney Myer Music Bowl project came about through the auspices of the Sidney Myer Charity Trust, bringing to fruition an idea expressed by businessman Sidney Myer.

Winner of the R.S. Reynolds award for architecture in 1959, ‘The Bowl’ was recognised as ‘a project needed by every community or city of any size in the world, a building used by people, semi-enclosing space for a cultural purpose’.

The design was conceived by Barry Patten of the firm Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffiths and Simpson.

According to the jury for the Reynolds prize —

“We are coming into an era where larger and light-weight, space spanning structures will be needed. Many drawings or diagrams of what such shapes might be have been published, but few proposals have solved the most difficult problem — the skin itself. Here we have an architecture that is a strong statement of the problem-solving approach, which results in a fresh, original solution. The winners of this competition have done a remarkable job in joining several sciences and arts all into one cohesive design concept. This comprehensive structure demonstrates their combination into one unity, architecture, structural and electrical engineering, acoustics and landscape design become one ... If the approach and principles of the winners are followed, architecture may soar to new levels of freedom, utility and grace.’

The Bowl has fixed seating for 2,100 people, with a total capacity of about 25,000 in the grounds, however in the mid 1970s, rock concerts drew huge crowds extending into Kings Domain. While most people were unable to see the stage, the Bowl’s unique design allowed the sound to carry far into the trees. Though not the first building utilizing tensile cables and thin shell roofing, the design and engineering methods used in the Bowl project also carried far, stimulating rapid development of this type of construction.

1. Excerpts from Jury Report, R.S. Reynolds Prize published in Architectural Record, June 1959 Yuncken Freeman Architects Pty Ltd and Predecessors, 1984.0047

St Paul’s Cathedral

From 1837, interdenominational church services in the colony of Port Phillip were held in a wooden building on the corner of William and Little Collins Streets. Various denominations soon established separate sites, and made plans for more permanent buildings while the Church of England remained on this site. In 1839, work began on a stone building designed by Robert Russell, and in 1847, with the arrival of Bishop Perry, this church became the Cathedral for the See of Melbourne.

In 1884, a parish church of St Paul that had stood on the site of the first open air services on the corner of Swanston St was demolished to make way for a more grand Cathedral. When the cathedral opened in 1891, St James’ reverted to a parish church. This church was moved stone by stone in 1913–14 to its present site on King St.

There have been many contributors to this Melbourne landmark. English architect William Butterfield designed the cathedral but never visited Melbourne so architects Terry and Oakden and later Joseph Reed supervised works by builders, Clements Langford. Following the resignation of Butterfield, Reed re-designed the Cathedral Offices and Chapter House. Over the years countless artists, suppliers and trades have played their part to build St Paul’s. In 1926, Sydney architect John Barr re-designed the spires that completed the original project. While the Cathedral may look like a nineteenth century building, additions and alterations have been made to meet changing requirements and incorporate contemporary technologies. For example, gas lights have been replaced by electric ones, an illuminated cross was erected in the 1928, ramp access has been put in place and specialised audio equipment has been installed.
The Shrine of Remembrance — Forecourt

Victoria’s monument to those who served in the second world war was designed by a man whose personal experience of that war brought him to Australia. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1893, Arnost Edward Mühlstein established his architectural practice in the modernist style and travelled widely in Europe to study architecture of all periods. Mühlstein was Jewish — warned of his impending arrest, he fled Czechoslovakia in 1939.

Arriving in Adelaide in 1940, Mühlstein joined the practice of Lawson & Cheesman and began to settle in to a new city, taking an active role in local theatre. He enlisted as a ‘friendly alien’ with the Royal Australian Engineers, which brought him to Melbourne in 1945. At the end of the war he remained in Victoria, acquired Australian citizenship and anglicised his name to Ernest Edward Milston.

Following WWII, the Trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance sought concepts for a memorial to complement the WWI Shrine of Remembrance. Two architects proposed a forecourt with EE Milston’s design selected. Both the Shrine and the Forecourt have classical roots, with the Shrine based on the Mausoleum of Halicarnassos and the Forecourt based on the Acropolis in Athens. Milston’s design features flagpoles to represent the armed forces, an eternal flame and a cenotaph with sculpture created by George Allen. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II dedicated the Forecourt during her first visit to Australia, in 1954.

The WWI Shrine and WWII Forecourt form the structure of Victoria’s war memorial, with other conflicts remembered by statuary and garden elements, some of which have been relocated to the site.

Trades Hall

Many campaigns have gone out from Trades Hall — by radio during the depression, by banners on the façade, by protests and marches. An embodiment of the slogan ‘Proud to be Union!’ Trades Hall has provided a physical home for many unions and allied groups since the middle of the 19th century.

The first hall was a simple structure built to commemorate the successful 1856 campaign for an 8 hour day and to provide a meeting place where members could pursue educational and cultural aims, and plan further industrial strategies. This building stood until about 1917. By the 1870s, plans for a more substantial Trades Hall Literary Institute were taking shape, with Joseph Reed as architect. Many phases of extensions and alteration have taken place since then, including many undertaken by the architectural practice established by Reed and Barnes that continues to this day. As unions grew in strength during the 1880s, the Trades Hall also grew. Following a successful strike by the newly formed Tailoresses’ Association in 1883, a Female Operatives Hall was built, as at that time women were not permitted in the committee rooms. This building was demolished in 1960.

Trades Hall became increasingly grand, but its caretaker lived on site in a simple cottage, more like the housing of most union members. Despite his presence, in 1915 Trades Hall was robbed by notorious criminal Squizzy Taylor.

While the Union movement has seen many changes over the years, Trades Hall endures — the oldest continually used trade union building in Australia.

Sophie Garrett
Celebrating A.G.M. Michell


Associate Professor David Shallcross introduced speakers who provided insight into the design of Michell’s brilliant invention, the tilting pad thrust bearing, which remains in use today. Professor Emeritus Peter Joubert reflected on the workings of the thrust bearing while Rear Admiral Peter Marshall AM, elaborated on its naval applications. The Dean of Engineering, Professor Iven Mareels then unveiled a plaque donated by IMarEST Vic Branch which commemorates A.G.M. Michell’s contribution to engineering.

Chairman of IMarEST Vic Branch, Mr Ken Hannah, acknowledged the University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) as being the ideal place for the deposit of the A.G.M. Michell papers. The collection contains his notes, technical data, drawings and correspondence, and is the only known source of papers on the development of the thrust bearing technology in existence. This new deposit complements a number of existing collections held at UMA that together represent the largest extant collection of Michell papers, including those documenting the development of the A.G.M. Michell laboratory and over 2000 drawings of Michell’s crankless engine.

A permanent display, located in the Engineering School, will feature reproductions from the collection which were displayed at the celebration. Archivists have documented and packaged the collection for conservation purposes and the finding aid is now available via the UMA website. Select digitised items such as the blue print plans will be made accessible via the University Library digital collections.

UMA wishes to express its appreciation to IMarEST Vic Branch for the deposit of the collection and for their support for the digitisation project.

Melinda Barrie and Helen McLaughlin

Accessing our Images

Photographs are popular and richly rewarding resources for research and scholarship. They bring a visual dimension to our understanding of the past, often telling us far more than the photographer intended about the events, places and people they document.

Over the last ten years UMA has built up a small but heavily used online collection of digitised photographic images known as UMAIC – the University of Melbourne Archives Image Catalogue. Earlier this year we gave UMAIC an overhaul, upgrading both the underlying database and the online interface which enables researchers to access UMAIC’s collection of digitised photographs. Now incorporated into our collection management database, EMu, our digitised images and associated descriptions can now be much more easily maintained.

Like most archival institutions, UMA has to date digitised only a small portion of our photographic holdings. Many, many original photographs are to be found throughout UMA’s personal and corporate collections. However our digitisation program is growing and is a key strategy in our efforts to enable remote and digital scholarship and enhance public access to our collections. Researchers can browse our ‘new UMAIC’ by clicking on the ‘Images’ search option from our home page. www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/archives/index.html. Some images are subject to copyright. Archives staff can advise on terms and conditions of use.

New to UMAIC

This recently digitised photograph of Flinders Street Station, Melbourne, comes from the records of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Railways Union, held by UMA. Taken in 1895 and looking north-west towards Flinders and Elizabeth streets, several business premises are visible behind the trains and platforms: Hosie’s Hotel, Wallach’s Furniture, Coal Creek Proprietary Co., Craig Williamson & Thomas Warehouse, E.L. Yuncken Glass and Norwich Union Chambers.

Fiona Ross
'Have you any Uni. Archives?': Frank Strahan and the Melbourne Historical Journal Archives

June 1961 marked the launch of the Melbourne Historical Journal, and the first anniversary of the appointment of Frank Strahan, the University’s founding archivist. Periodically, over the course of the 1960s and into the 1970s, Strahan contributed selections of documents from the University of Melbourne Archives to the fledgling student history journal. These were published alongside the essays of students from ‘Max Crawford’s School of History’. Recently, the Melbourne Historical Journal celebrated its 50th anniversary with the publication of Written into History: Celebrating fifty years of the Melbourne Historical Journal 1961–2011. In that publication, the sociologist Raewyn Connell noted that Crawford’s department promoted the use of archival material to the point that students came to ‘fetishise’ primary sources. Strahan’s archives did much to promote that obsession.

Connell, who edited the Journal’s fourth edition in 1964, recalled that her first entry into Strahan’s orbit occurred soon after arriving in Melbourne, as a helper in an exhibition that displayed select documents from the UMA. Almost 50 years after that event she remembered the excitement of a young history student first entering the archives. Connell’s experience as a helper, she recalled, got me entry into their collection and I became interested in the records of colonial businesses, which for some reason the University collected. A little later I went to Gippsland to visit some distant cousins, then still running a family business that dated back to the gold-rushes, and had a wonderful holiday trawling through nineteenth-century letter books. These memories evocatively recall the immediate impact of the collection that Frank Strahan had so recently begun to amass, and which so many of Connell’s generation of undergraduate researchers were keen to investigate for their articles in the Melbourne Historical Journal. Little wonder then that the Journal’s editors invited Strahan to include his select documents from the UMA in their publication.

Before research for Written into History began, I knew very little about the Journal’s past. As one of about ten editors to join the MHJ collective in 2009, I remember our distinct confusion about the Journal’s history. The turnover in the editorial staff for any student publication is rapid, making any attempt to maintain collective memory a futile act. Nevertheless, I was keen to know more about MHJ’s past. Looking through back issues, I knew that it had started as an undergraduate postgraduate research journal in the 1980s, and that throughout its history many of Australia’s finest historians have made their start in its pages. I’ve always been interested in first stages of people’s lives: what journeys they travelled on in becoming the people they are. Hundreds of young Australian historians have contributed to MHJ over the years, but I was keen to know what these young scholars were doing behind the scenes as they prepared their journal. With the Journal’s 50th anniversary approaching, I went to the editorial collective to see if anyone else was interested in finding out more about its history and the many coming of age stories that it contained. Given my target audience of young historians, it’s probably no surprise that the response to the idea was positive.

When I came to undertake research into MHJ, the archives of the Melbourne University Historical Society were my first stop. The society that founded the journal has long since ceased to exist, but its giant minute books, letters to publishers and contributors, and receipt books are still held within the UMA. For most historians there is always a moment of relief when you find the archives that you hoped were out there...
somewhere. That relief is quickly replaced by anticipation about what the archive contains. Rarely, I think, do historians stop to consider the circumstances in which the archive came into being or the effort that went into collecting all that material together. It was with some surprise then that I discovered Frank Strahan had that work in the pages of *Farrago* in June 1961, the same month of *MHJ*’s release.

The task of collecting the University Archives must have been an enormous undertaking and so Strahan employed creative methods in seeking out its sources. An article titled ‘Have you any Uni. Archives?’ reveals Strahan going about his assiduous role, publicising to anyone who would listen the archive’s new objective ‘to document the affairs of the University and to bring records which do not concern the University, but are of value for researchers’. His message to *Farrago* readers was more specific, however. He appealed to ‘all clubs, societies and other student associations for information . . . any old minute books, correspondence, diaries, books of accounts, working papers, which may be of use for this project.’ The reference to the archives as a ‘project’ got me thinking about the long process of collecting any archive and the life of the archive subsequent to any document’s accession. In some ways archives are always a project, the initial collection phase being only one stop in their long life.

Fifty years after Strahan’s appeal for ‘the old files of clubs and societies’, I sat in the UMA with Graeme Davison to look over the Melbourne University Historical Society’s material. Today, Davison is one of Australia’s most well-known and regarded historians, but in 1961 he was a callow 20-year-old, a member of the Historical Society, and intimately involved in the *Journal’s* foundation. It was a quiet day and we received special permission to discuss the contents of the minute books in the hushed reading room. Looking through the lively minutes that included the names of some of Australia’s finest historians at the very outset of their careers was an interesting process. For Davison, there was a fair amount of good-humoured embarrassment as we read through lively accounts that often devolved into what he called ‘a juvenile version of the History Wars.

These archives contain numerous stories not just about the life of a journal but also about the changing shape of the history profession in Australian universities. Some 25 years after Davison’s time at the University of Melbourne, the archives revealed a young Penny Russell circulating a ‘heroically misspelt’ mock editorial amongst the collective, teasingly calling for the journal to act as a ‘sustained radical attack on elitist intellectualism’. Another document from the ever-expanding archives was a poster advertising volume 14, published in 1982. It recorded that the journal was ‘$3 out now’, and contained an iconic image taken by one of the then editors, David Goodman, of a road sign pointing in one direction to Melbourne, in another to Sydney, and then, somewhat incongruously, in another direction to Carlton. That kind of Carltonian view of the world did not go down well with some of the *Journal’s* critics. Recently Goodman recounted that, with an eye towards semiotic criticism, he was accused that his road sign could be read for signs and significations of a particularly elitist Melbourne University culture. All these stories made it into the history of the *Journal*.

In putting together *Written into History*, my co-editor Erik Ropers and I wanted former editors and contributors to contribute short reflective essays of their experiences to compliment our traditional, well-footnoted history. Having heard Alistair Thomson, author of *Moving Stories* — and coincidentally an *MHJ* editor in 1983 — speak about the interesting ways that archival sources and memory can corroborate, contradict and illuminate each other, I decided that I should send our essayists the documents from the archives so that they might rethink their memories. Some of the most interesting contributions in our anthology occurred after the author had been reconnected with a document that described events that had long since been forgotten or that challenged their memories. Penny Russell, now a renowned Australian historian, wrote of her shock on being confronted by the sight of her mock editorial written as a young PhD student in 1987:

> The document is in my handwriting, and I cannot deny authorship (though I am pretty sure that it was a collective effort). But I have no recollection of when, where, how, or even quite why, I shaped its curious message. It has sent me on my own small quest of historical interpretation.

In the *Melbourne Historical Journal*, and other student publications like it, we have endless stories about how students lived, worked and educated each other during their years at university. Perhaps if they are lucky, historians researching publications like *MHJ* will find archives to tell the behind-the-scenes stories. Having finished our publication, we are eager to hear more stories about student life. Although the current state of the historiography on student life at Australian universities remains somewhat patchy, because of Frank Strahan’s early initiative to collect ‘old files of clubs and societies’ and the ongoing project undertaken by subsequent university archivists, future researchers will discover rich deposits to mine.

Keir Wotherspoon

Keir Wotherspoon is currently writing a PhD on mid-century US media and activism in the School of Philosophical and Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne. Over the past three years, when not studying for his thesis, he has been an editor on the Melbourne Historical Journal and a contributing editor to *Written into History: Celebrating Fifty Years of the Melbourne Historical Journal* 1961–2011. Work for that volume was based on extensive use of the University of Melbourne Archives collections.

4 University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne Historical Society Papers, acc. no. 1976.6023, box 4, Penny Russell, ‘MHJ editorial’ to Mark Peel.
5 Penny Russell, ‘No Pasaran!’, in Wotherspoon and Ropers (eds.), *Written into History*, p. 231.
The University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) is forging some new directions, building on developments over a number of years as well as taking some fresh approaches. Following a relaunch of the online catalogue and the addition of hundreds of detailed finding aids in 2011, in 2012 the popular University of Melbourne Archives Image Catalogue (UMAIC) has been refreshed, as discussed by Fiona Ross in this issue of UMA Bulletin. We are currently in the test phase of exposing our collection data to Trove, the National Library's online search service for Australian research resources. With the vision of bringing a critical mass of our collections to new researchers and the public online, we are developing a digitisation strategy and at the same time gradually increasing the digitised content available via UMAIC and the University Library's digital repository. This is creating many professional and technical challenges, which colleagues are meeting with energy, resilience and inventiveness.

While the wheels turn behind the scenes, a renewed approach to raising the profile and use of the collections is bearing first fruit. UMA staff members have presented talks to hundreds of University of Melbourne undergraduate and postgraduate students in historical and philosophical studies, architecture and conservation, with a view to increasing awareness and use of the collections by some of our closest potential clients. We have also approached academic staff in a number of subject areas to explore how UMA collections might be used in teaching and research. Professional staff working in the areas of development and alumni relations, faculties and cultural collections are also benefiting from our collections and expertise to support campaigns, anniversaries and exhibitions. A particular focus this year has been the 150th anniversary of the teaching of medicine. In this issue of the UMA Bulletin you can read about our activities with the Faculty of Engineering

We are dipping our toes in the waters of social media. You can find us on Facebook and Twitter to catch up on the latest news from UMA. There is also a steady stream of news and events on our website and the University Library's collections blog. The potential of our collections to support research by family and local historians is being explored through a number of talks and partnerships. We have mounted three displays drawing on archival material from UMA collections in the Baillieu Library this year: in February the intriguing and sometimes striking collection of documents, scripts, photographs and posters from Melbourne's La Mama Theatre, in June the records of the truly remarkable University of Melbourne Social Survey conducted during World War II, and the outstanding collection of architectural plans of some of Melbourne's iconic buildings to coincide with Open House Melbourne and the University of Melbourne Cultural Treasures Festival over the weekend of 28-29 July.

A source of inspiration in the midst of all these activities is the variety and depth of the collections. The discovery of the only known recordings of episodes from the groundbreaking John Henry Austral political advertising campaign by the Liberal Party for the 1949 federal election was discussed on national radio and analysed in a feature by Stephen Mills for Inside Story. The full text of the report of the royal commission into the 1912 Mount Lyell fire in Tasmania will be made available in the Library's digital repository to commemorate the 100th anniversary of that disaster in October.

Thank-you to all our researchers, supporters and colleagues helping us dig deeper into these wonderful collections. Thanks also to Susie Shears and Kathryn Dan, who jointly provided very successful maternity cover while I was on leave.

Katrina Dean