

# Getting to Know You

Tracy White Senior Archivist – Documentation /  
Kaiatawhai Pūranga Matua.

## **Who are you and where are you based?**

My name is Tracy White and I am currently employed as Senior Archivist – Documentation / Kaiatawhai Pūranga Matua, at Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision at our office in Te Whanganui-a-tara. I am part of a team of two; along with my Team Leader / Kaiārahi Tira Pūranga ā-Tuhi, Mishelle Muagututi'a, we care for the non-moving-image and mostly non-aural materials (although our collection does hold some oral histories and other sound items), which provide supporting and historical context to the film, television and sound collections.

## **Can you tell us a little about the path that led you to your current role?**

I fell in love with archival materials while researching my thesis, appreciating their immediacy and ability to connect the researcher across time with people and events, along with the huge variety of materials that were retained, and the special care taken in their housing and organisation. These experiences followed me through some very fruitful time working in bookshops, and then on into a job at Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) Library. Here I worked across a variety of teams and enjoyed helping our students to 'demystify' the library system and access the materials they needed.

I was lucky to be given the opportunity to spend time working again with archival materials in the VUW Library's Special Collections at the J.C. Beaglehole Room. Not long after I decided to follow this passion in my career path by completing a Postgraduate Certificate in

Information Studies (emphasising records and archives) through the VUW programme - aided by the fact that I was able to work in field at the same time.

In 2014, I moved into my role at Ngā Taonga, via a contract position, assisting my colleague Mishelle in processing one of our largest collections, the business papers of Pacific Films Productions Ltd. I'm now fortunate to work full-time as an archivist within a dedicated team, helping to preserve and connect our public with taonga that illuminate the behind-the-scenes stories of film and broadcasting production in Aotearoa.

**What is your biggest challenge at your archive/in your role?**

As with many archives, one of our biggest challenges would be our backlog of material yet to be processed, in combination with storage, space and general resourcing shortages. For our small team in particular, the challenge is to give equal energy to all facets of our roles, which cover the full gamut of archival services in relation to a large and growing collection – from researcher/reading room supervisor to appraisal and selection of new deposits to physical and digital preservation of collections to accessioning, arrangement and description. The bonus is that no day is ever the same!

**What is your biggest opportunity for your archive/role?**

This year staff at our Taranaki Street office will be moving to spaces in the National Library premises, due to our current home being yellow-stickered. While this will undoubtedly be a challenge, it will also add to the myriad of opportunities on offer to us every day. We will be engaged in the re-thinking of our services, in particular how we can continue to preserve and provide a high level of access to collections from the new site, while also acknowledging our history and forbears – such as our founding director Jonathan Dennis, who is commemorated in the name our current library/reading room.

**If you could enhance or change any part of your services or role, what would that look like?**

We care for a vast collection of photographic/stills materials, which

are also some of the most at-risk and heavily requested items in the Documentation collection. In an ideal world, our team would expand in numbers in various directions so that members were able to focus on more specific tasks. We would particularly love to have an archivist to work intensively on preserving and digitising the photographic collections, which would ultimately result in quicker and easier access for our researchers.

**What is your favourite archive or collection with the highest use?**

I'd be hard pressed to select a favourite collection as there is so much variety and so much to find fascinating. At nearly 300 boxes of material the Pacific Films Productions Ltd Collection is probably our largest archive, and covers not only a huge range of material types – such as production records, correspondence, business and financial papers, scripts, photographs, location research, design elements, props and costumes – but also represents the huge contribution that one of our most prolific independent production companies made to the development of Aotearoa's film and broadcast industry from the late 1940s to the early 2000s. For this reason, it can resonate with people doing research into so many different areas.

**Do you have any recent notable acquisitions or taonga that you'd like to highlight to ARANZ members?**

As a result of the merging of the former NZ Film Archive with the RNZ Sound and TVNZ Archives, we are now receiving more deposits from individuals who have worked in the television or radio broadcasting industry, or across both. As a small sample, we have recently received wonderful team and studio/set photographs related to television productions from the 60s and 70s, along with fascinating items such as a specialized protractor used to map out camera positions in television studios, and ephemera related to the early days of 'It's In the Bag' – including branded coasters that were thrown into the audience by Selwyn Toogood.