

## Getting to Know You

Rachel Bell

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

Like many people, my path to becoming an archivist was a fairly circuitous one. I have a background in the arts and jewellery trades but became increasingly conscious that this may not sustain me long-term. I had also done some work in galleries and libraries, and wanted to pursue this further but wasn't sure which direction to take. After a lot of research, a lot of cold-calling, and some volunteer work, I decided to re-train, and embarked on the MIS at Victoria University. Towards the end of the MIS, I began doing some research work for staff in the department, then got my first job managing a small archive at a private school in Auckland. This was quickly followed by the opportunity to work with the Fletcher Trust Archive. I loved it from day dot and am so appreciative of how kind and encouraging people already working in the field have been.

***What is your biggest challenge in your current role?***

I'm largely sole charge in the role, and while I'm very happy to work alone, it can feel a bit isolated at times. The bigger issue though is that without colleagues to confer with, decision-making can be slow, and as someone so new to the profession, I sometimes experience uncertainty about the choices I'm making. In saying this, I'm very lucky to have some generous mentors, and it has taught me to get very comfortable asking questions and getting advice from others in the industry. It also means that I have to really think through and understand the processes I'm carrying out, rather than doing them because it is existing protocol, or because I was asked to.

***What is your favourite archive or collection you have seen or would like to see?***

It's archive adjacent, but the most exciting collection I've experienced was the Museum of Anthropology (MOA) at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. As a textile enthusiast, I particularly loved the incredible weaving and basketry, coupled with the feat of also having storage areas on display. The aspect that struck me most, however, was how the accompanying text thoughtfully discussed very complex issues around museums and colonisation, indigenous knowledge, and the sometimes problematic nature of collecting.

***What do you most enjoy about the work you do?***

Although the Fletcher Trust Archive began as an in-house corporate archive, and we do have a lot of administrative records, because of the enormous scope of Fletcher Challenge and their related businesses, we have material related to the built environment and industry across Aotearoa. As such, there is a lot of social history embedded in this too, and I really enjoy this aspect of my work. I find the 'puzzle' of the archive and of responding to research requests satisfying, and love connecting people with information, especially where it is meaningful and relates to their own family or community history.

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

Last year I worked on a small project to digitise Arrowhead magazine, the Fletcher Holdings company magazine from 1954 to 1980. It is a delightful trove, containing images of Fletcher Construction projects at the time and a wide range of content related to various industries they were involved

in. Each issue usually included 'personalia' pages with information about events, staff marriages and family additions, and they are wonderful examples of graphic and publication design of the day. They are worth a look, are great resources for family and community history researchers, and full, word-searchable PDF files are available at

<https://collection.fletcherarchives.co.nz/highlights/arrowhead-mag/objects>