



Getting to know you...

Regular feature profiling New Zealand's archive community

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What services do you provide?

I sit within the Information, Library and Enquiry Services team, AKA the Documentary Heritage Team. Collection development and exhibition support are at the core of my role but I'm part of an incredibly multifaceted team that perform many, many roles across the museum. Supporting external and internal research and enquiries is a central function. Our collections are available by request through our Library Reading Room (open to the public Monday-Saturday 10am-5pm) and increasingly available online.

Being digitally accessible is a key aspect of our function and because of this the documentary heritage team has been at the forefront of many digital initiatives that have supercharged the Museum's offsite and online accessibility. This includes image order service, collection digitisation, Collections Online (which now brings over 1 million collection objects to the screens of the world) and Online Cenotaph, the crowd-sourced database established to commemorate and share biographical and service information about New Zealanders who have served in our armed forces. As a former member of the archive and research team at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand, I can attest to what an absolutely invaluable resource Cenotaph is so it feels great to be working for a team at the forefront of this stuff.

What are your current holdings?

The Library cares for and provides access to the Museum's Documentary Heritage collections. These comprise manuscripts, ephemera, maps, charts and plans, newspapers and periodicals, rare and contemporary books and pamphlets, photographs, and works of art in the form of paintings, bookplates, and sketches and drawings. The Museum's own business and

research archives are housed alongside these. The Documentary Heritage collections speak to the entire Museum across all collection areas but also to the history of the Museum as an institution – it weaves throughout all aspects of our operations.

What is your biggest challenge at your archive/in your role? / What is your biggest opportunity for your archive/role?

I'm going to roll challenge and opportunity into one answer as I think often these form two sides of the same coin. For us it's thinking about active born-digital collecting and setting up systems and processes that enable us to do this sustainably. This is not only where we want to be but where we need to be. Born-digital needs to be on the agenda of all museum people who work with collections but especially within the documentary heritage realm. There's no getting around it – this is what contemporary and future collecting looks like. The vast majority of human creativity, interaction, relationships, activism – you name it – is created digitally. We all make bold claims about collecting for the benefit of future generations but if we don't rise to the challenge that born-digital presents us, then we are letting history slip through our fingers.

It might not be easy and there are many reasons to put it off – perceived lack of knowledge, thinking that it's someone else's job, and that technology changes so fast that it feels like you will always be one step behind. But maybe we just need to change our angle and approach this new frontier collaboratively and collectively build a robust sector that is ready to face this future together.

What is your favourite or most important collection?

We have some incredibly significant collections – the breadth and depth of it is a continual delight. Looking at Edmund Hillary's Everest summit diary was pretty special – a take your breath away kind of moment.

I have to say, however, that I have a real soft spot for ephemera. Because these objects are, well, ephemeral, they speak to a specific, fleeting moment in time. That kind of lens is so incredibly revealing and multifaceted. A protest poster, for example, not only communicates details of an event or action but also tells us about design and popular culture. Ephemera can be unintentionally revealing, often speaking to the wider social context of that moment in history. It's a beautiful snapshot of time and place and the very fact that it wasn't intended to last is why I love it so much. These collections generally aren't comprised of 'hero pieces'. Instead they are often homespun, community driven and made - this is why they are so important. I'm excited about the potential

of collecting social media for the very same reason. Like ephemera it's transitory but revealing and gives voice to the everyday.

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

It's not an acquisition but the John Logan Campbell collection, which is cared for at Auckland Museum on behalf of the John Logan Campbell Residuary Estate, was recently honoured with an inscription on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, along with other nationally and internationally significant collections from the Hocken, Alexander Turnbull Library and Waipu Museum. This inscription joins The Sir Edmund Hillary archive and A Korao no New Zealand, also held at Auckland Museum. What we do most definitely is not about accolades but initiatives like the MoW register helps to shine a light on documentary heritage and raise public awareness of what we do and the importance of our collections because, as the name suggests, what we collectively preserve (past, present and future) forms the memory of the world.

At this year's National Digital Forum, Eric Meyer from the Oxford Internet Institute said something that resonated with me. He spoke about invisibility and the fact that because so many of our services exist online now, we are increasingly removing ourselves from the picture. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it means we are constantly fine tuning what we do and finding new ways to meet our public's needs outside of the museum walls but it's also important to be visible. Similarly, despite making important leaps and bounds in making our collections digitally accessible we must also remember to recognise and celebrate an object's intrinsic 'thingness'. Initiatives like UNESCO MoW register are important reminders of this fact. And we did receive a certificate, so it is an acquisition of sorts!