PRESIDENT'S REPORT



By Richard Foy

In my 2024 President's Annual Report for Archifacts, I began with a reference to the oft-quoted aphorism "*change is a universal constant*". At that time, this was my reflection on the confronting and tumultuous times within our sector, in the midst of shrinking public services, restructuring of institutions, and general malaise brought on by 'austerity'.

A year on, in 2025, many of those changes remain in motion and continue to be felt within our community and by members. However, I'm reminded of a personal mantra that I tell myself regularly - in times of existential desperation as well as in moments of personal contentment - "*Everything is temporary. Nothing is permanent.*" I tell myself this because it helps me keep perspective when times are tough, but also when things are going swimmingly, so that I don't get too despondent, nor too complacent with my lot in life.

Those words and sentiments are of no specific origin, but they possess a striking similarity to the Buddhist doctrine of *anicca*, the mark of impermanence that exists in the Universe as all things, physical and mental, come into being and eventually dissolve. The tenet of *anicca*, or impermanence, also has strong associations with the thermodynamic concept of *entropy*, the tendency for systems to naturally drift towards greater disorder and dissolution.

I draw out these philosophical and scientific notions of impermanence and disorder because they are the forces that our archives, records, and information management community are in perpetual pitched battle with. We are constantly reminded of the ephemeral nature of memory and the evanescence of our human existence in time and history. As archivists, record keepers, and information managers, we often take quixotic stands against the *agents of deterioration* - in vain hope of holding back the inevitability of decay, and of disappearing from memory, from record, from space-time.

Despite the gloomy presence of *anicca* and *entropy*, ours is not a futile pursuit. Even if information chaos is inevitable, there's nobility and human value in holding on to, and preserving, our memories and identities - however fleeting that may be on a cosmic timescale. Civilisations, empires,

nation-states, institutions, and communities are all temporary, according to Buddhist tradition and the laws of thermodynamics, but for brief moments our collective and individual lives carry meaning. Someone had better be keeping an account of us in those moments.

That's *our* work, and *our* calling.

We are not alone in our noble pursuit as a profession to remember, and to be remembered. This is where I draw strength, and hope, from our interconnectedness with others who share our thirst for recollection and remembrance. I refer to those who work adjacently and collectively alongside us in the archives, records and information world - librarians, museologists, archaeologists, researchers, genealogists, historians, educators, creatives, and all those committed to protecting, and creating, our cultural heritage and democracy.

Ours is a team-sport. If we're ever going to truly succeed in our collective mission, we really need to learn how to play as a versatile, purposeful, and coordinated team. Teamwork - at both sector and ecosystem levels - is what I'm instinctively drawn to as a strategy for sustained success. The challenges facing our ecosystem demand that we work in alliance with adjacent parts of civil society - our fellow associations. We must actively engage with the institutions that collect, manage, preserve and provide access to the primary 'sources'- notably archival records, artefacts, and places - and also influence the arms of government responsible for public policy and funding. The challenge is simply too big for our association alone. Working together - across disciplines, institutions, and communities - is how we shape our sector's future.

Our sector faces tremendous and momentous change in the years ahead. Not just from the sheer scarcity of resources and waning public attention, but from the creeping advances in digital information, data storage, and access - and the imminent onslaught of artificial intelligence (AI). We're being inundated with endless servings of 'AI Slop' churned out by powerful, hyper-scaled Large Language Models (LLMs). The surging quantity and improving quality of this synthetic slop is making it almost impossible for mere humans to discern fact from generated fiction. To filter the signal from the noise.

This is where I have faith in our community. Archivists are the OG data scientists. We have always worked to amplify our signal over the noise, mining the *context* and meaning from the chaos of *content*. We're well placed to face artificial intelligence, neural networks, and sycophantic chatbots head-on. We're exactly the professionals who can understand and exploit the benefits of LLMs, rather than simply being swamped or befuddled by them.

The cacophony of artificial 'intelligence' and 'information' assaulting our society's senses will surely have profound implications for our profession, like all technological advancements. But, as society's addiction for the 'artificial' and the 'synthetic' grows at vast scale, I believe that we'll want to lean into what is uniquely and distinctively non-artificial - that is, being human. Our human profession deeply understands and upholds the values of provenance, evidence, authenticity, trust, and the human experience. This is our difference. Where LLMs find statistical patterns in data, we look for meaning.

I'll say it again. This is *our* work. This is *our* calling.

It is our community of fabulous - and organically intelligent - humans that continues to draw me to ARANZ. Co-convening the 2024 ARANZ/ASA/PARBICA conference in Ōtautahi reminded me of the deep connections I have with this community, its professionals, and its institutions. The conference felt like both a reunion and a homecoming - reaffirming for me that the archives and records community is my professional home, my people, my tribe. I know that many other conference delegates shared those same feelings of kinship and connection. All 100% natural, nothing artificial.

Next year, 2026, will mark the 50th anniversary of the Archives & Records Association of New Zealand, *Te Huinga Mahara*. As we all look towards that momentous anniversary date, we'll want to spend some time acknowledging, remembering, and celebrating the first fifty years of this wonderful Association. Half a century is not even a blink of an eye for the cosmos, but it's roughly half a human life for some of us. We can begin contemplating the next 50 years of our Association's life, first by honouring our collective past, and then by imagining what we want to become. I'm betting that we humans will be firmly enmeshed in a rich, diverse, and flourishing ecosystem alongside our partners and stakeholders, all

the while harnessing the utility of our AI assistants. It's anyone's guess whether ARANZ will make 100 years, because *everything is temporary*, but if we do, it'll be from the efforts of our enduring human relationships, values, and connections as an Association.

I conclude by acknowledging and thanking all those who contribute to the strength and vitality of our Association - my fellow ARANZ Council members, Branch Committees, ex-officio volunteers, and our wider membership who continue to show up, speak up, and support one another. My warm thanks also go to the editorial team behind Archifacts - Sarah Welland, Dr Maja Krtalić and Dr Alison Day. Thank you for stewarding this journal with care, expertise, and dedication. Archifacts remains a vital *space*. Not just for publication, but for contemplation, commentary, and conversation across our community.

Happy reading!

