Digital recordkeeping initiative
In memory of Dhakiyarr
Annette Shun Wah’s story
Vale Professor Neale

Professor RG (Bob) Neale AO, first Director-General of the National Archives, passed away in Canberra on 1 May 2004 at the age of 85.

He had been appointed Professor of the History Department of the University of Queensland in 1965, where in addition to teaching he undertook research and writing on political and diplomatic history. As Editor of Historical Documents in the Department of Foreign Affairs, one of his enduring legacies is the series of volumes entitled Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937–49.

In 1975 Professor Neale was appointed the first Director-General of the Australian Archives. His task was to transform a relatively small and obscure organisation into a nationally recognised institution providing high quality recordkeeping and archiving services to the Australian government and people.

Perhaps his greatest achievement was the enactment of the Archives Act in 1984. This task took nearly a decade of Professor Neale’s skill, tenacity and diplomacy, and ensured that Australia gained national archival legislation that continues to serve us well.

Professor Neale retired in 1984, but together with his wife Ann was a welcome guest at our events in Canberra. It clearly gave him much pleasure that the Archives at last had a national building for which he had campaigned so determinedly.

Professor Neale is remembered with affection and respect by all who knew him at the Archives as a loyal friend and a visionary leader.
Melbourne office moves north

Our Melbourne office recently moved uptown, and some would say upmarket, from Casselden Place in the CBD to the Victorian Archives Centre in North Melbourne.

The new reading room offers state-of-the-art facilities, where researchers can view records from our collection and those of the Public Record Office Victoria in the one place.

We have shared a reading room with the Public Record Office Victoria since 1997, the first partnership of its kind in Australia and one that has set the standard for joint Commonwealth–State archives initiatives.

Later this year the partnership will extend to the use of shared storage facilities. We will be moving our most frequently used records to joint storage at the North Melbourne site.

We celebrated the official opening of the new reading room in May with readings and displays of some treasures from our Melbourne collection. Guests were treated to an excerpt from a 50-year-old tape recording of Vladimir Petrov indicating his intention to defect. Samples of original records on display included an Australian WWI battle plan from Lord Casey’s collection, requests from Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith to land in various destinations, and a letter from Malcolm Fraser to the Minister for Territories on equal pay for Aboriginal Australians.

Our collection in Melbourne is especially rich because it was the original seat of the Commonwealth parliament until 1927 and it remained a centre for federal government activity until the 1960s.

As a result, the Melbourne collection includes records from many departments of state including the Postmaster-General’s Department, the Department of Labour and National Service, the Department of Civil Aviation and the Department of Defence.

At the same time as our new reading room opened, we also launched our presence at the Genealogy Centre at the State Library of Victoria in the city. A dedicated terminal gives access to our collection databases, to a range of publications for family historians, and to passenger lists for the port of Melbourne.

So if you need to access our collection database from the city, you can still do so. But do call in to our premises at the Victorian Archives Centre, 99 Shiel Street, North Melbourne, and see all the new facilities.

Conservator Chris Loretto shows Professor Bill Russell some of the gems in our Melbourne collection.

Celebrating the opening of our new reading room in North Melbourne (left to right): our Director-General Ross Gibbs, Advisory Council member Alex Somlyay, Melbourne Director Ross Latham, Chair of the Aboriginal Advisory Group Muriel Cadd, and Advisory Council Chairperson Paul Santamaria.
Canadian-born, Boston-trained architect John Horbury Hunt arrived in Sydney in 1863, and over the next 40 years became renowned for the distinctive and radical architecture he introduced to Sydney and surrounding New South Wales. Although he attracted an influential and wealthy clientele, receiving commissions for cathedrals, churches, schools, an art gallery, a department store, houses and homesteads, he died in poverty in 1904.

The landmarks he left behind include the Chapel of the Sacred Heart at Rose Bay, boasting a stone vaulted roof – the first of its kind in Australia.

Hunt’s buildings have a dramatic presence because of their siting, asymmetrical balance, and impressive brickwork and craftsmanship. He was at the forefront of the worldwide movement where every brick and board was placed for structural purpose, not ornamentation.

Somewhat eccentric, Hunt had his bicycle fitted with a collapsible drawing board, carried drawing instruments in special pockets in his clothes and drawing paper in a compartment in his hat, should a detailed drawing be needed on the spot.

Sadly, Hunt is largely forgotten, but many of his buildings survive to remind us of his extraordinary talent.

From the Historic Houses Trust of NSW, the exhibition Radical Architect: John Horbury Hunt 1838–1904 celebrates the life and work of this complex and controversial character. The exhibition is on show at our Canberra gallery until 31 October.
Preserving Canberra’s heritage

Canberra’s blueprint now online

Created in 1911, the Griffin plans for Canberra are now featured in glorious detail on a website called An Ideal City?

In partnership with the National Library of Australia and the National Capital Authority, we’ve created a website about the 1912 competition to design an ‘ideal city’ for the new nation. The content is based on a joint exhibition by the National Library and the National Archives, also called An Ideal City?, shown in 1995.

The website tells a compelling story of the competition within the broader contexts of Federation and international town planning, presenting extraordinary images of all 46 shortlisted plans, each with expert commentary, together with photographs and other records from our collection.

Whether you’re a town planner or simply interested in Canberra’s design and development, An Ideal City? will inform and engage you. You’ll find the website at www.idealcity.org.au.

Architects of Canberra landmarks designed in the early 1900s would be surprised to know that their sketches and plans are still being consulted almost a century later.

Recent events like the Canberra bushfires which destroyed Mt Stromlo Observatory, and the implosion of the Royal Canberra Hospital, have sent 21st century architects back to the original plans for the valuable information they contain.

The plans and drawings of early Canberra in our collection cover everything from bus shelters to hostels and homes, capturing a fascinating architectural impression of the development of the national capital between the 1920s and the 1950s.

Noteworthy examples are the plans for the Canberra hostel (now the Hyatt Hotel), the Whitlam House (built to attract the Deputy Crown Solicitor and father of former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam to the national capital in the 1920s), and the Canberra Public Swimming Baths (now known as Manuka Pool).

These valuable and sometimes fragile records are regularly consulted by architects, public officials, students, builders, home owners and researchers.

Over the last two years we have been preserving and digitising these plans to make them accessible to a wider public.

All 14,000 items in the collection have received preservation treatment and then been digitised. The digital images are progressively being added to our RecordSearch database, providing ready access to the public while allowing the originals to be stored and preserved in optimum conditions.

To explore the plans online, simply go to RecordSearch on our website, and enter series number A2617.
According to Dr Peter Shergold, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the digital revolution has transformed the way public servants do business.

‘Paper may still be with us’, he observes, ‘but to an ever-increasing extent, it is the detritus of electronic communication. Every day we work and think on email, type word-processed documents, calculate spreadsheets and read websites.’

The challenge facing government archival authorities everywhere is how to ensure that electronic records are captured, managed and preserved in their original form, so that they are available in the future.

The challenge has led the National Archives to form the Digital Recordkeeping Initiative, a collaboration between all national, state and territory government archives in Australia and New Zealand to develop a uniform approach to digital recordkeeping.

Launching the Digital Recordkeeping Initiative at an e-government conference in Canberra in May, Dr Shergold acknowledged the difficulty of the task ahead.

‘So relentless are the cycles of innovation, and so rapidly does hardware and software become obsolete, that the digital archive is in danger of becoming a crypt for a dead technology. The electronic machines of tomorrow may well struggle to read the electronic communication of today. That is why it is vital to convert and store digital records in a standard and stable format.’

This collaboration will build on the work already done by the National Archives of Australia and the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) on standardised formats that can be read by future technology. This includes the Archives’ Xena software and the PROV’s Victorian Electronic Records Strategy (VERS), which have attracted much attention from the archival community, the records industry and government here and overseas.

Xena stands for XML Electronic Normalising of Archives. It uses XML, a computer mark-up language, to convert electronic records into a standardised format that does not depend on proprietary software or hardware to be read. The use of XML is central to the Digital Recordkeeping Initiative’s uniform approach to digital preservation.

In launching the initiative, Dr Shergold emphasised the importance of keeping...
To help government agencies improve their management of digital records, we have added several new online products to our suite of recordkeeping standards, guidelines and manuals.

Digital Recordkeeping: Guidelines for Creating, Managing and Preserving Digital Records covers all aspects of digital recordkeeping, including creating, capturing, managing, storing, securing, preserving, and providing access to digital records. It also covers their disposal and transfer to the Archives. Digital records include electronic messages, web-based records and encrypted or authenticated records. The guidelines also provide an overview of our XML-based approach to long-term preservation of digital records. They apply to those that have been ‘born digital’ as well as those that have been converted into digital format.

The Digital Recordkeeping Self-Assessment Checklist, a companion publication, is designed to help government agencies evaluate their management of digital records and identify areas for improvement.

Recordkeeping and Online Security Processes and the General Disposal Authority for Encrypted Records Created in Online Security Processes provide advice on the use of authentication and encryption technologies. These technologies help ensure that business transactions conducted online are trustworthy, confidential and secure. But the technologies also pose significant recordkeeping challenges.

The guidelines examine the issues and provide advice on how agencies can meet their security and recordkeeping needs. The companion disposal authority allows for the disposal of encrypted records created during online security processes, subject to certain conditions.


Audit Office. This disposal authority, released on 28 April 2004, is just one of the products of the Audit Office’s DIRKS project. DIRKS is a standard methodology for designing and implementing recordkeeping systems. These and other disposal authorities can be viewed online in the recordkeeping section of our website under ‘Disposal’, at [www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/disposal/summary.html](http://www.naa.gov.au/recordkeeping/disposal/summary.html).

**Training**

**DIRKS workshops**

Step B – 7 September 2004, Canberra

Step C – 19 October 2004, Canberra

For more information, please look under ‘Recordkeeping – Training’ on our website at [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au) or ring (02) 6212 3764 to discuss your needs.

**Recordkeeping contacts**

For advice on recordkeeping standards and guidelines, including DIRKS, appraisal and metadata

Tel: (02) 6212 3610  Fax: (02) 6212 3989

Email: recordkeeping@naa.gov.au


Preservation and disaster recovery

Tel: (02) 6212 3424

Digital preservation Tel: (02) 6212 3694

Audiovisual preservation Tel: (02) 9645 0104

Members of the Initiative are the National Archives of Australia, Archives New Zealand, Public Record Office Victoria, State Records New South Wales, Queensland State Archives, State Records of South Australia, Archives Office of Tasmania, State Records Office of Western Australia, Territory Records Office Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory Archives Service.


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It may seem like yesterday, but the Beatles’ only Australian tour was exactly 40 years ago. While nearly everyone has jumped on the Beatles bandwagon this year, we too can boast of our own slice of Beatles memorabilia.

Despite their fame, once the Beatles had a ticket to ride to Australia they still had to complete an incoming passenger card. The signed cards for the Fab Four (well, Fab Three plus fill-in drummer Jimmy Nicol) dated 11 June 1964 are in our collection. Ringo arrived in Sydney with Beatles’ manager Brian Epstein a day later, so we have their arrival cards too.

The Beatles’ cards provide interesting snippets of information – such as their ages, date of their visit, occupation, where they lived and how long they intended to stay. You’ll also find the answer to a possible trivia question – what is John Lennon’s middle name? Think of a current Australian leader.

One curious detail on John’s arrival card relates to his marital status. The box marked ‘single’ has been ticked and then crossed out, and the box marked ‘married’ has been ticked. Did John first try to hide his marriage to Cynthia Powell? Did he think better of it, being an official document? Possibly, but because the handwriting seems to be the same on all three Beatles’ cards, it’s plausible that someone else completed the details for the band and initially forgot John was married. Although the Beatles’ details may have been filled in by someone else, their signatures are definitely authentic.

When they arrived in Australia, the Beatles had just finished their third album and their first film – A Hard Day’s Night – and were at the peak of their popularity. Australians turned out in droves in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, including an estimated 350,000 people who lined the long and winding road from Adelaide airport to the Southern Australia Hotel.

The Fab Four crammed 20 concerts into a whirlwind 10 days, performing twice a night in Adelaide (4 concerts), Melbourne (6 concerts) and Sydney (6 concerts) before flying out to New Zealand for a week and returning to Australia for four more appearances in Brisbane.

The Beatles’ arrival cards have now been digitised and are on our website at www.naa.gov.au. To see the cards of John, Paul and George, simply click on RecordSearch, key in A1225, 9–12 June 1964 NSW next to ‘Reference number’ and then click on ‘View digitised copy’. For Ringo’s card, key in A1225, 12–14 June 1964 NSW.
In May this year, over 500 visitors were lured to our Canberra building, where the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) once lived, to look into our files and listen to talks on espionage and intelligence. Younger visitors played spy for a day – dusting for fingerprints, writing secret messages using invisible ink, and sending coded emails to their friends.

The head of ASIO, Dennis Richardson, was on hand to officially launch the day. His opening remarks highlighted the important relationship between the Archives and ASIO, which ensures that ASIO records are archived and made available to the public after 30 years, allowing Australians to review past events and decisions.

Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Technology in Sydney, David McKnight spoke about how he used our records to research his book Australia’s Spies and Their Secrets, and provided a historical perspective to Australia’s intelligence organisations today.

Michael Thwaites, former head of ASIO’s counter-espionage branch, recounted his role in the defection of Vladimir Petrov, the Head of Soviet Intelligence in Australia in the early 1950s. The story is also told in his 1980 book, Truth Will Out – ASIO and the Petros.

Dressed in trench coats and hats, ‘undercover spies’ roved the building, lurked in corridors and handed out programs to visitors. Behind the scenes, visitors looked at copies of ASIO and other espionage-related files, surveillance photographs and videos from our collection.

Those wanting to know how to research ASIO records in our collection were offered inside advice by our reference staff. In her talk on ‘Moneypenny’s Hot Tips for ASIO Files’, Merilyn Minell explained how to gain access to ASIO files, and why some material within them is exempt from public access.

Screening all day was the The Mysterious Miss X documentary, containing footage from our collection on ‘Sylvia’ (Kay), a double agent who worked on an ASIO case involving the espionage activities of Soviet First Secretary Ivan Skripov.

For those who missed the excitement of the day, the transcript of David McKnight’s talk can be viewed on our website at www.naa.gov.au/exhibitions/events/speakers.html.
In November, we will be launching the latest in our series, which tells the story of Dhakiyarr (also spelt Tuckiar) Wirrpanda, the first Indigenous Australian to be represented in the High Court of Australia.

An elder of the Dhudi-Djapu clan of east Arnhem Land, Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda had been found guilty of murdering a white policeman, Constable Albert McColl, and was sentenced to death by the Northern Territory Supreme Court in 1934. After a public outcry against both the verdict and the sentence, a successful appeal to the High Court was lodged on his behalf.

Finding that the earlier trial had been unfair, the High Court overturned the conviction. Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda was released from gaol and was to return to Arnhem Land, but disappeared in mysterious circumstances in Darwin a day later.

The events which led to the 1934 High Court appeal captured the interest and imagination of many Australians. It was a complex tale involving the deaths of seven men, punitive police expeditions, the capture of Aboriginal women, missionary interventions and large public protests. The case touched on some of the most contentious issues of the 1930s, and some that still resound today – the rights of Aboriginal people to their land, the differences between white and Aboriginal law, and the treatment of Aboriginal people by police and the legal system.

Government officials in Canberra were among those captivated by events in the far north in the early 1930s. Two in particular were HC Brown, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, and JA Carrodus, Chief Clerk of the same department, who acted as the Administrator of the Northern Territory for six months at the height of the case in 1934. Their files show how they not only followed events but also played a part in shaping them. The High Court appeal that eventually freed Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda was lodged by the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Darwin at the request of Department of the Interior officials in Canberra.

The Uncommon Lives website uses the records of government to unravel the complex tangle of events that eventually led to Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda’s disappearance. The website features government letters and telegrams, public letters of protest, photographs, press reports and legal documents, including...
the original High Court file which is now part of our collection.

Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda’s own voice cannot be heard in the archival record. But in the dozens of files recently digitised for the website, we can see the tremendous influence his case has had on the law and on the Aboriginal rights movement over the past 70 years. It was his people, the Yolgnu of Yirrkala, whose campaigns for recognition of their rights to traditional lands resulted in the 1963 Yirrkala bark petitions, the first traditional documents recognised by the Australian Parliament.

To discover more about Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda’s story, visit the website at uncommonlives.naa.gov.au. The full site will be released in early November.

For nearly 70 years, the mystery of Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda’s disappearance meant that a Wukidi or funeral ceremony could not be held for him. This remained troubling and unfinished for his family. The small amount of evidence available points to his death in Darwin. In June 2003 his family, together with other Yolgnu, held a Wukidi ceremony there.

It was a historic and moving ceremony of reconciliation between the Wirrpanda and McColl families, the High Court and the Northern Territory Supreme Court and Government. The Wirrpanda family presented the Supreme Court with nine magnificent larrakitj or coffin poles, which will remain in the court building as a permanent memorial to Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda.

In return, exactly one year later the Supreme Court presented the Wirrpanda family with a handcrafted archival album produced by the National Archives at the Supreme Court’s request.

The album contains copies of documents taken from files held in our collection and tracks Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda’s story from the time he left Arnhem Land until his disappearance in 1934. It also includes material on the 2003 Wukidi ceremony. The album covers and box were made by hand by our specialist conservators.

The presentation, attended by our Director-General Ross Gibbs and the Director of our Darwin office, Phyllis Williams, took place as part of a ceremony in Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda’s homeland in east Arnhem Land on the anniversary of the Wukidi ceremony on 28 June 2004.
Dennis Richardson, head of ASIO, at the recent ‘Spies Who Loved Us’ event held at our Canberra building on the 50th anniversary of the Petrov affair (see story on p. 9).

The inaugural Multicultural Documentary Heritage Workshop held by the National Library of Australia in June brought together 45 representatives of culturally diverse community organisations from all over Australia. As part of the program, participants visited the Archives to learn how to set up and manage an archive and access family migration records.

Professor Geoffrey Bolton, our 2004 Frederick Watson Fellow, is researching Paul Hasluck and his influence on indigenous affairs and foreign policy. Before becoming Governor-General in 1969, Hasluck served as Minister for Territories, Defence and External Affairs under various governments during the 1950s and 1960s. The fellowship, offered each year to encourage scholars to use our collection, will enable Professor Bolton to complete a book on his research topic. As part of the fellowship, Professor Bolton presented a seminar to staff and will deliver a public lecture later this year.

Tracey Nikolaou (right), great-niece of government architect John Smith Murdoch, and her mother Barbara Murdoch. Among other famous 1920s Canberra government buildings such as old Parliament House, John Murdoch designed East Block, now the home of the National Archives. Barbara and Tracey visited us recently to donate precious documents and photographs from the architect’s personal collection.

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At the opening of the new reading room in North Melbourne, acting Assistant Director-General of the Archives, Maggie Shapley (left), catches up with former Director of our Melbourne office, Dr Thea Exley (see story on page 3).

Celebrating the opening of the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards Exhibition are (left to right) Geraldine Tyson, our exhibition manager, Anna Malgorzewicz, exhibition curator and Director of the Museum and Gallery of the Northern Territory, Tony Henshaw, Managing Director of Government and State Sales at Telstra, Matilda House, representative of the Ngunawal people, our Director-General Ross Gibbs, and Franchesca Cubillo, keynote speaker and Artistic and Cultural Director of the Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute.

David Swift, our Brisbane director, speaking at the opening of the Family and Local History Fair held at Mount Gravatt, Queensland on 30 May. The fair is organised by the Queensland Association of Local and Family History Societies every second year.

Education Manager, Beatrice Barnett, talks to students from the School of the Air who recently visited our Canberra building. The students were surprised to see that we held documents about their school dating back to the 1950s.
Circling the Pacific, sixty years on...

Extract from the diary of a Japanese internee, which describes daily life in Loveday internment camp. NAA: AP613, 95/1/101.
While Rosemary Také’s wish is not unusual, the story of her grandfather’s internment, as revealed by documents held in our collection, certainly is.

Rosemary’s grandfather, Takéo Tsuji, was one of 834 Japanese prisoners-of-war who were ‘repatriated’ from Australia to Japan in August 1942, in exchange for Australian nationals. But like many other Japanese internees from Loveday camp in South Australia, Takéo Tsuji was not returning home but to a country he had chosen to leave over 20 years earlier.

The men were long-term residents of New Caledonia – miners, farmers and fishermen who had migrated there from Japan in the early 1900s. It is presumed they were arrested in New Caledonia and interned in Australia at the beginning of the war. Their families and homes awaited them in New Caledonia, thousands of kilometres from their final destination.

According to records held in our Adelaide collection, five of these New Caledonian men felt so strongly about their removal to Japan that they lodged formal declarations to the Loveday camp commandant requesting exclusion from repatriation, preferring to remain interned. Yet, a little over a week later one of the five were reported to have ‘now requested that they be allowed to go’, and on 18 August 1942 they joined 830 others on the SS City of Canterbury when it sailed from Melbourne.

Many of these men never returned to New Caledonia from Japan, and their children and grandchildren, like Rosemary Také, grew up not knowing about their time of internment in Australia or why they were sent to Japan.

In October last year, Rosemary and a group of 20 other members of the Amicale Japonaise de Nouvelle-Calédonie (Japanese Friendly Association of New Caledonia), led by association president Marie-Josée Michel, came to Australia to discover what they could about their family members’ lives as internees in Australia in World War II.

Early on the group’s itinerary was a very moving visit to the site of the former internment camp at Loveday. Once a camp covering 440 acres of cultivated land and housing over 5000 male internees, Loveday was so large that it had its own hospital, bakery, piggery and post office, and its poppy farm was the largest producer of raw opium in Australia. Now all that remains are a few concrete foundations partly hidden by weeds in the open fields.

In an effort to learn about the daily lives of their relatives in this place where so few clues remained, Marie-Josée, Rosemary and several others visited our Adelaide office. At the time of their pilgrimage to Loveday, Rosemary was unsure whether her grandfather had even been interned there, but in a military security file about the repatriation of Japanese internees she struck gold, finding her grandfather listed on a Loveday nominal roll.

In this same file is a diary kept in meticulous Japanese characters by a Japanese internee from Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) recounting events in the daily life of Loveday internees. The New Caledonian researchers pored over the English translation of this diary, building up a mental picture of life in the camp. They read of surprise inspections of tents, the issue of clothing, food, newspapers and tobacco, funerals for internees, Japanese language lessons, Charlie Chaplin movies, physical drills, wrestling and baseball matches. The diary also recorded the arrival of new groups of internees, the purchase of a ‘talky projector’, the effect of weather on labouring, and occasionally, and most treasured of all, entries about the movement of particular men from New Caledonia to other camps.

Although no Loveday case files or index cards for the researchers’ relatives could be found, we were able to provide copies of dossiers on 24 of the New Caledonian Japanese internees sought.

Marie-Josée wrote:

‘Our pilgrimage was really successful on all points: close friendship in the party, good organisation, nice people we met, abundant collection at the National Archives, nice weather, warm welcomes and so many things.

We have got the serenity and the appeasement of our spirit, happy to re-build our ancestors’ roots and reconstituting the puzzle of their lives.

All our thoughts are of gratitude.’
Family research can have a shaky foundation, because its starting point is almost always personal memory, transformed – like Chinese whispers – over generations of telling and retelling. But that is precisely what makes it so meaningful and rich.

My quest started with a photograph. My father had quite a collection, stashed away in a small zip-up suitcase kept at the top of the hallway cupboard. The image that caught my eye was a portrait taken in Hong Kong of a middle-aged woman in traditional Chinese dress. I asked my father who she was, and he replied, ‘That’s grandma’. I forgot about it for a few years, but sorting through his photos after he died, I came across the portrait and once again it had me intrigued – the look of steely determination in her eyes, hands that seemed too large for her slight frame. But this image of grandma didn’t match up with my memories of her.

I was only six years old when she died, but she’d lived with our family on various occasions for several months at a time. She looked after me while my parents went to work and my two older brothers went to school, although it felt as if I were the one looking after her – massaging her tired legs, thumping the headaches away from her forehead, or squeezing blackheads from her nose! She was supposed to be the frail one, but she seemed to have some sort of unspoken power that bound our extended family together. When she died, it was as if we were all cut adrift.

There was a clear disparity between my memories of this frail old lady, the matriarch who could wrangle the rather feisty and wilful characters who are my aunts, uncles and parents, and the image in that old photograph.

By collating stories I’d been told by my father and aunt, and the help of our family historians, Stan and Dot Hoy, I came up with a broad outline of grandma’s life. She was born in Darwin in 1892, the fourth child in a family of eight.
My great-grandfather named her Sam Moy – third daughter. Her mother – my great-grandmother Leung Wai Ching – insisted that her daughters should all be married off by the age of 18. Dutifully, Sam Moy married a Chinese merchant named Chou Yor Kee in 1910. They moved to Longreach in Central Queensland, the end of the railway line as it was then, and set up a general store in the main street.

My grandparents took a great deal of time and care to choose an auspicious name for their new business. They settled on one that denoted civil and harmonious dealings: ‘Shun Wah’. The local townsfolk assumed it was the family’s name, and it stuck. I can’t tell you how relieved I am that my grandparents didn’t name their store something that meant ‘Charlie’s bargain basement’.

My father, born in 1923, was the second youngest of their children. Eight months after the birth of the youngest, Queenie, my grandfather Chou Yor Kee succumbed to typhoid. It was 1927. My grandmother was left to single-handedly raise seven children and run the family business. Then five years later she packed up everything – the shop, the home, the family – and took her children to China. She was honouring a promise she’d made to her husband to take the children to their homeland to learn their culture.

They settled in Hong Kong, where my father finished his schooling. When the Japanese occupied Hong Kong in December 1941, the family evacuated to the mainland. After the war they regrouped in Hong Kong, but with the growing strength of Communist forces in China, and difficult postwar conditions, the future looked bleak. One by one, they returned to the land of their birth, Australia, leaving only my Uncle Roy and his family in Hong Kong.

Grandma followed in 1950. And that’s the grandmother I got to know – the quiet old lady, who never ventured from the house, relied totally on her children, and spoke little English. To flesh out this outline I began some formal research – seeking verification of facts, dates and places – and sought out other relatives who might have a memory of her.

The birth certificates of grandma’s seven children placed the family in Longreach from the date of birth of the eldest, my Uncle Walter, in 1912 right through to grandfather’s demise in 1927. But for all of this, there was nothing about grandma, other than her copybook signature, which appears on some of the children’s documents as their legal guardian.

At the National Archives in Brisbane, I found files for my father and each of his siblings. From these documents, I discovered the name of the steamship that took them to China – the SS Changte. They set sail from Townsville on 26 January 1932 – Australia Day.

(continued next page)
Trawling through the National Archives database RecordSearch from my home in Sydney, and on two trips to the Archives in Brisbane about a year apart, I searched on all possible permutations of her name. The searches did surrender up some files, but I rejected them because the dates were completely wrong, or because they were not held in Queensland or the Northern Territory, the two places where grandma had lived. What I didn’t know, and hadn’t allowed for, was that when Sam Moy returned to Australia in 1950, she sailed into Sydney. Her file was in the National Archives’ office in Sydney, where I live!

Sam Moy Shun Wah’s 16-page file contained her Document of Identity, a stack of official correspondence verifying she was who she claimed to be, and finally a letter that granted permission for her return to Australia in 1950. Still, grandma on paper didn’t match the woman in my photograph. I needed to know more about her personality.

I asked my relatives about her, but their replies rarely went beyond ‘she worked very hard’. One distant cousin finally volunteered a photo of my grandmother as a young girl. Naturally, I begged for a copy and a few weeks later it arrived in the mail.

It was a family portrait, featuring the sweet faces of Sam Moy aged about 16 and some of her brothers and sisters. In the middle of the gathering, looking straight ahead with grim determination, and strong hands that looked too big for her slight frame, was their mother – my great-grandmother, Leung Wai Ching.

There was another photograph in the package my cousin sent me. It was a portrait of great-grandmother taken many years later in Hong Kong. I took out my traditional photo of ‘grandma’, the one that had sent me on this quest, and placed it beside the portrait of great-grandmother.

Finally I realised. My photo was not of my grandmother at all. It was of great-grandmother. My father hadn’t made the mistake, I had. I’d asked him who she was, and he replied naturally, ‘That’s grandma’. His grandma.

A mistake, a Chinese whisper, had sent me off on a quest. You can’t rely on the accuracy of memories, interpretations, even formal documentation, but if you take them all together even mistakes can lead you – eventually – to some amazing discoveries.

Marking our history

Our website will soon feature a short history of the National Archives, marking significant events in our evolution.

This new addition to the site will be launched in Canberra in September, to coincide with our major international workshop on Digital Preservation and the Australian Society of Archivists’ annual conference. It will highlight notable 10-year signposts on our journey.

1944 – Ian Maclean was appointed as the Commonwealth government’s first Archives Officer.

1954 – Dr TR Schellenberg, Director of Archival Management at the National Archives in Washington, visited Australia, advocating the case for a national archival organisation separate from the National Library.

1964 – The Interdepartmental Committee on Commonwealth Archives recommended that an Archives Act be passed.


1984 – The Archives Act came into effect.

1994 – We launched the public programs initiative, making the Archives more accessible to the general public, and the Playing for Keeps conference, highlighting a key stage in our management of government electronic records.

The website will include online copies of key publications, many of them now out of print or difficult to find. Each one will be linked to a landmark event, documenting the development of our professional thinking about archives and our expanding role in keeping valuable government records and making them accessible to the public.

Two new pieces will also appear: Simon Davis’ account of the history of the National Archives’ involvement in electronic records and Hilary Golder’s short sequel to her book Documenting a Nation which the Archives published to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1994.

You can find our new website addition Our History: The National Archives of Australia at ourhistory.naa.gov.au.
**Exhibitions**

**Radical Architect:**
John Horbury Hunt 1838–1904
National Archives, Canberra
12 August to 31 October 2004

**The Policeman’s Eye:**
Paul Foelsche Photography
National Archives, Canberra
25 November 2004 to 6 February 2005

**Charters of Our Nation**
National Archives, Canberra
Permanent exhibition

**‘No Common Creation’:**
The High Court of Australia
National Archives, Canberra
Permanent exhibition

**It's a Dog's Life:**
Animals in the Public Service
Museum of the Riverina, Wagga Wagga, NSW
November 2004 to 6 March 2005

**Beacons by the Sea:**
Stories of Australian Lighthouses
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Tas
25 September to 28 November 2004
Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tas
11 December 2004 to 30 January 2005

**Unexpected Archives:**
Introduced by Robyn Archer
Queensland Performing Arts Museum, Brisbane, Qld
1 September to 3 October 2004
Illawarra Performing Arts Centre, Wollongong, NSW
9 October to 14 November 2004
Albury Regional Arts Gallery, Albury, NSW
17 November to 9 December 2004
Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, NSW
14 December 2004 to 30 January 2005


**Events**

**TASMANIA**
A display of records and objects about Tasmanian lighthouses and shipwrecks at 13 venues around Tasmania. Contact (03) 6230 6104.


**CANBERRA**

Speakers Corner
Talks are free, but bookings essential: 6212 3624.

Dr James Curran discusses his book The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image, 12 September, 1pm.

Mark Carmody, celebrity gardener, springs into veggies, 19 September, 1pm and 3pm.

Don Watson talks about the decay of public language, 24 October, 1pm and 3pm.

Susan Kurosawa discusses the loneliness of the long distance traveller, 28 November, 1pm and 3pm.

Old Parliament House Rose Gardens, 4–5 December. Join the Archives in celebrating the re-opening of these historic gardens.


**SYDNEY**

Links with the Past: Finding Chinese Australian Family Connections Using Archives, 11 September, 10am – 5pm. Joint seminar by the Chinese Australian Historical Society (CAHS), State Records NSW and the National Archives. Mandarin Club, 396 Pitt Street, Sydney. Bookings essential (02) 8247 8613. CAHS members $25, non-CAHS members $30.

Caring for Your Keepsakes, 17 September, 10am – 4pm. Bring your keepsakes to the Conservation Clinic for advice. Held during NSW History Week. 120 Miller Road, Chester Hill. Bookings essential (02) 9645 0163.

Crossing the Barriers, 17–19 September. NSW & ACT Association of Family History Societies State Conference 2004, held at the Blackheath Community Centre. Visit our display stand and listen to our talk on recent initiatives. Full conference $95 (early bird $85), Saturday only $55, Sunday only $40. Contact (02) 4751 2746.

**ADELAIDE**

Archives reading room. Open Saturday, 11 September and 6 November, 10am – 4pm.

**PERTH**

Family History Fair, 19 September, 10am – 4pm. Visit our display stand. State Library of Western Australia, Alexander Library Building, Perth Cultural Centre. Contact (08) 9470 7531.


Family History Sources in the National Archives, 26 October, 10am – 12pm. Seminar held at our Perth office. Contact (08) 9470 7531.

www.naa.gov.au/exhibitions/events/events.html
At the end of the day, if it’s worth keeping, it’s in the Archives

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Tel: (07) 3249 4226

HOBART
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Tel: (03) 6230 6111

SYDNEY
120 Miller Road, Chester Hill NSW 2162
Tel: (02) 9645 0100

ADELAIDE
78 Angas Street, Adelaide SA 5000
Tel: (08) 8409 8400

DARWIN
Kelsey Crescent, Millner NT 0810
Tel: (08) 8985 0300

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North Melbourne VIC 3051
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PERTH
384 Berwick Street
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