

U M M A



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Documenting Business Activity – issues and challenges

Approximately 50 percent of the collections of the University of Melbourne Archives document business activity. They range from a single item to massive accessions stretching to many hundreds of boxes; from ledgers, cash books, share registers, pay sheets and statistical reports to legal documents and minutes recording decisions of boards of management. They relate mainly to Victorian based enterprises but practically every Australian state is represented; cover Melbourne operations, though a considerable number of collections are from regional businesses and practices.

A number of indications in recent years make it unlikely that our collecting will continue to be straightforward.

Firstly libraries and archives are not immune from the general funding pressure affecting universities. And, as Don Boadle details in the September 1999 issue of *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, since 1993 archives and records management operations in particular have suffered, including several outright closures. It remains to be seen whether Australia's other great collection of business and labour archives, the ANU's Noel Butlin Archives Centre, raises enough external funds by 2001 to ensure its continued operations. It is clear that no university archives has a guaranteed future.

Secondly, research use of business collections from traditional quarters such as academic history is declining. Most departments of economic history in Australian universities no longer exist, and to the extent that an historical perspective is incorporated into the most popular subjects offered at business schools, they would appear not to necessitate research in archives. Financial journalists and contractors producing anniversary corporate histories also seem to have learnt to make do largely with published material and interviews. And as Bridget Griffen-Foley's new book *The House of Packer* (Allen and Unwin, 1999) illustrates, even when the subject doesn't cooperate, access to corporate records is withheld and insiders stay silent, a 398 page account is still possible.

Thirdly, most Australian businesses don't even retain archival records to withhold from researchers and journalists. Recently, several ANU business historians surveyed the archives of Australia's top 100 non-financial enterprises measured by assets for 1910, 1930, 1952 and 1964. Of the 262 companies, the investigators found only 62 percent were known to still have collections. (See D. Terwiel, S. Ville and G. Fleming, *Australian Business Records: An Archival Guide*, ANU, 1998). Another survey, by archivists K. Dan and B. Smith reporting at

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the July 1999 conference of the Australian Society of Archivists, examined the extent to which businesses operate in-house archives, and the picture of closures was not encouraging.

A fourth complication is the 'dot.com' revolution. Communication and transactions now occur 'at the speed of thought'. The electronic handshake, on-screen document creation, e-commerce and the Internet all have implications for record keeping and thus archives. Today's business records look nothing like the combinations of leather, paper, ink and hand-writing which characterised much of past documentation; indeed there is already much which can't be seen at all due to systems obsolescence and limited concern for long term preservation when creating electronic records. Where will scholars doing case studies next century of accounting practices in the 1980s look for their primary sources?

One of the questions often asked in discussion of business archives is whether businesses themselves should take real responsibility for their archives, over and above enabling the occasional commissioned history to be compiled, underpinning accountability to stakeholders, and protecting one's interests, reputations and assets. Certainly there is very limited legal requirement to preserve records beyond standard corporation, taxation and related directives; nothing for example requiring the preservation of business documentation having any wider historical or heritage significance. As to whether it makes good business sense anyway for an enterprise to operate its own archives rather than creating landfill or outsourcing to a collecting archives such as UMA, opinions differ. Business archivists have their standard list of arguments (e.g. archives as sources for advertising, precedent and underpinning corporate culture generally). In BHP's response to its closure of BHP Steel at Newcastle, we see both a concern to preserve history fulfilling a public relations role and an acceptance of a community responsibility. Here the views of Dr Simon Ville, recently presented at the National Scholarly Communications Forum on archives are also relevant:



Presentation of a recent donation of board meeting notes and personal reminiscences of former company secretary of Foy and Gibson, Mr Allen Houghton (2nd from right). Also present (l-r) were Mr Michael Piggott, Associate Professor David Merrett and Professor Keith Houghton.

My experience of researching and writing business history over twenty years has convinced me that companies have much to gain from more active participation in the recording of their own history. A recent comparison of the stated policies of Australia's two largest stock and station agents, Dalgety and Elders, indicates the power of history. Dalgety stated that they would continue to specialise in stock and station activities since this is where the company had always been successful. Elders retorted, 'to stand still as a five per cent stock and station industry, we are going nowhere. It's a sunset industry'. Thus, both companies called on history but reached very different conclusions. In reality, neither has a strong understanding of their own history.

Ville's colleague at the University of Melbourne, Associate

Professor David Merrett, has also reflected on ways businesses such as banks can derive value for money in operating their own archives while also noting that rarely is full value realised. They include such areas as:

- supporting good corporate citizenship, especially in documenting accountability;
- assisting the day-to-day operations (for example speeches, guides to past practices);
- corporate culture; and
- providing lessons from history.

The need to encourage a stronger sense within the business sector of the importance of their past, is something the UMA must address, in concert with as

many supporters as it can find. A final challenge is re-stating the purpose of collecting and identifying what it is we believe we should be documenting. We hold the records of the smallest fraction of Victorian businesses, and what we have collected shows inevitable gaps and biases. There are industry sectors, types of enterprises and approaches to commercial practice which, so far as the archival record is concerned, hardly ever existed. It is time for stronger collaboration between businesses, scholars and archivists, and renewed analysis and reassessment by UMA archivists.

Michael Piggott, University Archivist

A Recent Acquisition

The John Ellis Collection of Photographs

The University of Melbourne Archives recently acquired the John Ellis Collection of photographs 1971–1996. A small celebration of this happy event took place in the Leigh Scott Room at the Baillieu Library on Wednesday 20 October, 1999. Reproduced below are extracts from two of the speeches made on that occasion.

Andrew Ray, Chair, Archives Advisory Board

On behalf of the University of Melbourne Archives and the Library today, welcome to this happy and important celebration marking the acquisition by the University of Melbourne Archives of the John Ellis photograph collection.

Even if I am preaching to the converted, I would like to remind you that the University Archives has the mission of collecting, preserving and making available for research the records of the University itself, of business and labour organisations and of various individuals connected to those three areas. We now hold some 12 or 13 kilometres of records and an Aladdin's cave of objects. Only about one third of our enormously rich holdings are of the University.

Today we celebrate the acquisition of the John Ellis Photograph collection, a unique record of the various protest movements over about the last quarter century. I use the word 'unique' with some care. The Shorter Oxford (where it appears between 'unipolar' and 'un-Irish'!)

says it means: 'one and only, alone of its kind; having no like or equal; superior to or different from all others; unparalleled; unrivalled'.

Therefore, we can all see that the word really does apply to the Ellis collection rather than the inappropriately hyperbolic way in which 'unique' is often misused today.

Whilst we are on the subject of definitions, I should point out that the Shorter Oxford defines a protest as: 'a formal declaration of dissent from some action or proceeding (1751)'.

Just at the time John began to take his photographs, a writer from Punch observed:

The protest march has replaced the queue as Britain's favourite communal activity. It's lively, it's an outlet for aggressive instincts, and it gives one something to do on a rainy day. Not least it's a good way of meeting the opposite sex. Hyde Park rallies, in particular are noted for being a more than satisfactory substitute for the old Palais de Danse.



One of the many 'street politics' images from the Ellis Collection – taken during the federal election campaign, in St. Kilda, November 1975 (Neg. no. 85).

And that was only a couple of years after EGW said, 'Quite small and ineffectual demonstrations can be made to look like the beginning of a revolution if the cameraman is in the right place at the right time'. I don't know, John, whether that was one of your inspirations.

This ceremony falls on a most interesting day — apart from the installation of Steve Bracks as Victoria's 45th Premier. On this day in 1935 the survivors of the Long March reached their destinations (on China's Yellow River). And on this day in 1915, just three months after 30,000

women marched down Whitehall, (British) Prime Minister Lloyd George granted their wish to assist the shortfall of labour, which had become critical even at that early stage of World War I. Amongst other positions, trams and buses were thenceforward to have a female conductor and a male driver — though unionists expressed great concern that the move would lessen wages.

The John Ellis collection comprises more than 12,000 black and white and colour photos, contact prints, negatives, an outstanding index and, very excitingly, the copyright. This is a superb exten-

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sion to our holdings and doubtless will be a heavily used reference source. You can scarcely look at any photograph in an Australian military publication without seeing an acknowledgement to the Australian War Memorial. I'm sure the same, in due course, will apply to the John Ellis collection in the University Archives. And not only for the various protests but also because, as you can see, they are a most important record of people and places and the times.

* * *

Professor Stuart Macintyre, Dean, Faculty of Arts

The English novelist Christopher Isherwood developed a form of observational realist writing in the 1930s, set in the demi-monde of Berlin and aptly captured in one of his titles, *I am A Camera*. In Melbourne, at least, that designation belongs to John Ellis. His camera is everywhere.

John himself has been caught up in that radical life for more than half a century. When I went out to his place last year to look at the range of the collection, I recognised him (even without the red neckwear) from the Trades Hall Choir. I can't recall having seen him at street marches or demonstrations, though the evidence of his attendance is undeniable, and usually you take note



Benny Zable making a symbolic protest, Gulf War rally, City Square, Melbourne, January 1991 (Neg. no. 318).

of someone with a camera on such occasions.

A number of his images show the importance attached by security guards and special police branches to the camera. In one of them the security photographer is up on the balcony of a police station, and I gather that he was extremely upset to be photographed while photographing. Another shows a Commonwealth police officer using a long-distance camera.

I shudder to think of the amount expended on spooks in the course of the 20th century and yet very few of the photographs have come to light. I've seen some from the Queensland State Archives, taken by the special branch there in the 1940s, but ASIO has been even more reluctant to release its photographic collection than the personal files of written material.

It now turns out that at least since the 1970s they have wasted their film. Here is a pictorial record of just about every trouble-maker of significance who has sought to weaken the nation's defences, every significant kill-joy who has grumbled about the improvement of a public park with motor races, or tried to prevent mining companies from going about their lawful business, or suggested that trees are more important than wood chip exports, or that we ought to have adequate funding for a public broadcaster.

Furthermore, the photographs are fully documented, the faces identified, and all linked to a computer base.

There are some departed comrades: Judah Waten, Don Dunstan, Lloyd Edmonds, Tom Hills, Ted Laurie, Manning Clark at a memorial service for Ralph Gibson looking serious, Ruth Crow (whose recent death we mourn) looking difficult. There are several of Sam Goldbloom, currently in poor health.

There are some faces that have changed, such as the youthful Humphrey McQueen in a flower-power shirt, and some that have not changed much at all, such as Jim Cairns'.

There are some overseas celebrities, Nelson Mandela and Daniel Berrigan, recalling the campaigns of the past, and there are local figures such as Pat O'Shane, Gary Foley and Geoff Clarke engaged in continuing causes. There is Pete Seeger, and also Margaret Roadnight and Danny Spooner. There are the women of Save Our Sons, Bob Brown and Laurie Levy, Phil Cleary, June Factor.

I even found a photograph of a postgraduate student whose research I am supervising, Sandra Bloodworth, along with a former postgrad, Jim Crossthwaite.

You'll spot many more and you'll see that this is a pictorial record of a quarter-century of political activism of great richness. I'm not sure just when John decided to build such a collection (perhaps he will tell us) but we are all in his debt.

John is modest about his photography. He says he wasn't seeking well-composed shots, that his priority was to get the image and record it. I think that is too modest. Many of these images are striking. His affinity for his subjects is apparent in the way they appear. There's no long-distance lens here; John records from the inside. ❖

The Languishing of Corporate History

by Alex Millmow
Lecturer, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga

Besides changing owners, the fund managers Bankers Trust are about to have their portrait — that is their corporate history, warts and all, written. Having a company history written is the ultimate accolade of success even if Henry Ford once said, ‘history is bunk.’ University and freelance historians are cashing in on the boom in corporate biographies, as it were. The paradoxical thing in all this is how companies distance themselves from their history, their archives, by storing them far away from corporate headquarters. There is not much space or time to contemplate a company’s glorious heritage or its lasting contribution to Australia’s economic history. Australia’s oldest bank, The Bank of New South Wales, now known as Westpac, lodges its historical files in an industrial estate at Homebush Bay amidst the largest construction site in Australia. Nor does the Big Australian, BHP, house its archives at its sleek headquarters in Bourke Street but at an atmosphere-controlled warehouse in Fishermens Bend. Both the National Bank and the ANZ group’s archives are inconveniently consigned to the outer suburbs of Melbourne.

Corporate histories of all these institutions have been written but does the separation symbolically indicate some sense of alienation from one’s past? The continual pressure of bottom line economics means that corporate archives are always in danger of being closed or donated to some university library. Indeed a few years ago the Westpac archives were closed to researchers as the bank sought out cost economies following a bad year. Yet there is a wealth of treasure still to be mined from those repositories. Fossicking through the Wales archives, for instance, mulling over the files and literary output of one Alfred Davidson, the bank’s general manager during the inter-war period, shows how much economists, indeed the nation remain, indebted to him.

Davidson, self taught in economics, was an egotistical, bull-headed, pugnacious fellow who did not suffer fools, especially politicians nor underlings, gladly. He was regarded as the most dynamic financier in the Southern Hemisphere. He was the man responsible for getting economists involved in the shaping of Commonwealth economic policy whereby wresting it away from the grip of conservative bankers.

When Keynes paid tribute to Australia’s small community of economists for having saved the country’s economy in 1931 with their Premiers’ Plan, it marked not just a coming of age for

the economics profession but a tribute to Davidson’s marshalling of opposition to orthodox thinking. Apart from being a confidant of all the leading economists of that era, Davidson was privy to Prime Minister Lyons. On and off he, together with economists, succeeded by putting more fire and ambition into the economic policy settings instead of the semi-slump conditions that some English-owned banks and the Commonwealth Bank wanted to impose. A committed Empire man, Davidson was concerned that London’s capital markets were, as Niemeyer reportedly put it, more than content to see ‘Australia stew in its own juices’ and not be given greater trade access to Britain’s markets yet still be expected to honourably meet her debt repayments to English banks.

Apart from his lobbying activities, Davidson is the man responsible for giving us the creature known as the business economist. He introduced economic analysis into banking decision-making; Davidson was the first banker to have economists advise him on portfolio and other commercial matters. And did it show? The Wales went, as one might put it, from strength to strength. Having economists advise on bond selling and buying operations, borrowing policy, interest rates, and the bank’s optimal level of exchange reserves secured the Wales pre-eminent position. At all times Davidson had at least two economists advising him on policy matters but he became renowned for having a score of young economics graduates compile statistical information for the bank’s management of its loan portfolio. At one stage the Commonwealth Bank came to the Wales for assistance in establishing their own statistical base of economy.

By 1948, some 67 graduates had been employed within ‘Davidson’s kindergarten’ as it became known. There were famous names amongst the class — Tange, Plimsoll, Potter, even a future treasurer, Bury. Eventually the most conservative of banks which had only years earlier attacked not just the intrusion of economists into the business of policy-making but also their ideas as ‘hi-falutin’ nonsense now advertised for their own expert advisors — with a better salary than the Wales to match. The day of the bank or business economist had dawned.

Who apart from a few crusty academics knows of Davidson’s work and contribution today? No bank building is named after him and certainly no university chair nor corporate endowment. The indifference meted out

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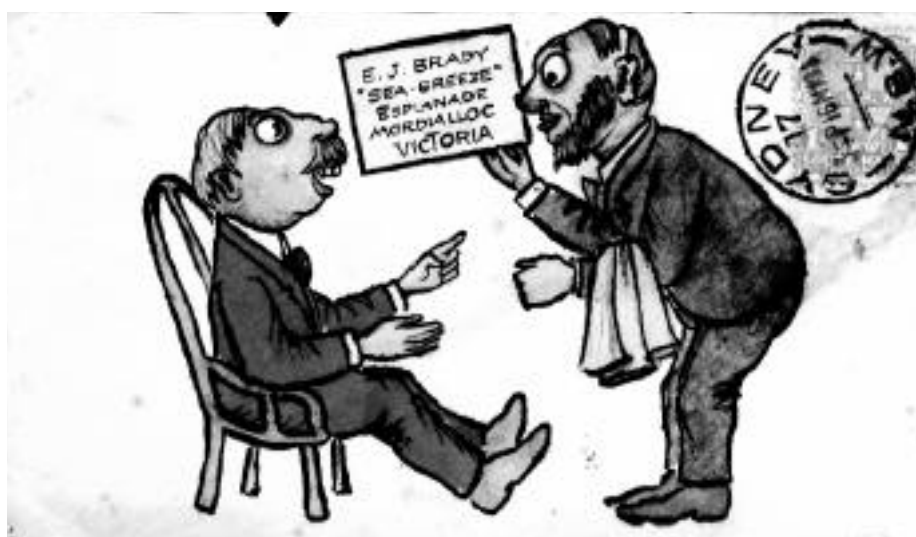
Continued from page 5 to him is no different than to other great corporate builders like Essington Lewis, the Baillieus or the mining magnate W. R. S. Robinson. The denizens of the corporate world have no time for history. Nor does the profusion of

MBAs on offer contain a skerrick of economies or business history. Apart from being a tad disrespectful to their forefathers, the big end of town may even be condemning themselves to repeating the sins of the past. ❖

E J Brady Papers in the McLaren Collection

by Gerard Hayes

Australian Librarian, Special Collections, University of Melbourne Library



The most playful response to Brady's 1911 questionnaire of writers came from Hugh Cleland McKay (born 1877), a sometime student of medicine at the University of Melbourne, pharmacist, amateur astronomer, science journalist, poet and wit. For all his gifts, McKay drifted into obscurity, but many who knew him remained convinced of his genius: Brady considered McKay and Katherine Mansfield the two most interesting of all the Native Companion contributors.

One of the lesser known gems of the McLaren collection in the University of Melbourne Library is a small collection of correspondence compiled by Edwin James Brady (1869–1952). Brady, a unionist, man of letters and would-be entrepreneur, turned his hand to many things but is now best known for editing the short-lived literary journal *The Native Companion* (1907).

The Brady papers in McLaren comprise two files of correspondence from various authors: the first, some 43 letters in response to solicitations of material for the Companion; the second, a collection of more general correspondence ranging in date from 1899 to 1933. Brady had an

eye to posterity: the letters in the first file are carefully inventoried in his own hand, and many of those in the second file are pasted on to sheets of paper on which he has written biographical information. Some of the letters in the second file have evidently been written in response to a biographical questionnaire circulated by Brady in 1911.

Many of the letters in the first file are apologies for not being able to offer copy. John Le Gay Brereton writes: 'I've just finished marking 1184 examination papers, and alongside me is a mighty heap of essays awaiting correction and comment'. Others wax lyrical about the sort of thing they want to write: 'real women and real men, with real emotions

and real sins' promises Grant Hervey. Helen Jerome, after pouring cold water over the name of the journal and deprecating its 'Lone Handish pose — that insistence upon forced cheerfulness and stereotyped smiles', begs Brady to 'let me write about real life'.

There are also chatty asides; Roderic Quinn laments 'I see Lawson at times — Poor Henry! And for all his casting away of chances I think I like (him) more than ever... he needs a rest, a long rest'.

Unfortunately there are no letters from one of *The Native Companion's* most celebrated contributors, Katherine Mansfield. ❖

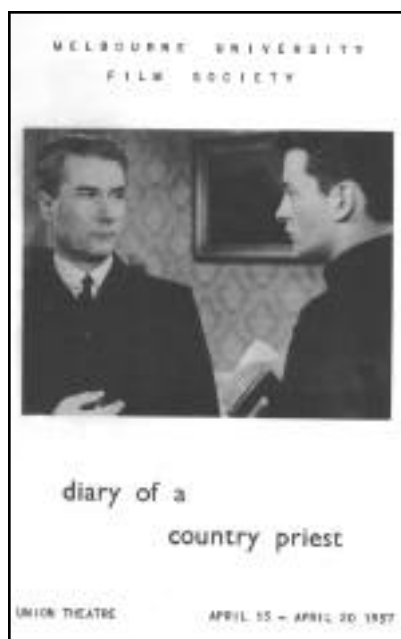
There's More to Films Than the Goldwyn Girls Know

The holdings of the Melbourne University Film Society
in the University of Melbourne Archives¹

by Quentin Turnour
President, Melbourne Cinémathèque

The Melbourne University Film Society (MUFS) operated as a Student Union-affiliated club from its first committee meetings in October 1948 until a few surviving, post-graduate members took the society off-campus to create the Melbourne Cinémathèque in 1984. Yet its historical influence beyond campus, on its own particular sphere of Australian Cultural life — Australia's cinema culture — has, amongst the Union's diverse assortment of clubs and societies, probably only been equalled by that of the University's major political clubs on Australia's party political culture. MUFS and its 'spin-off' graduate film association, the University Film Group (UFG), were central to the development of Australia's post-war cinema going and making. It provided a model for the exhibition of art and 'cult' cinema long before today's art house circuits or Astors were established.

In its internationally influential *Film Journal* (1956–1967) and its *Annotations On Film* (first published in 1955 and still published) MUFS was one of the first publishers of serious film criticism and comment in Australia. Out of University film festivals it had been running since 1949 (at least three years before the 1952 Olinda Film Weekend, traditionally thought to be the origin of this event) it co-founded the modern Melbourne Film Festival in 1954 and later the Australian Film Institute in 1958. It was central to the 'Carlton' movement of independent filmmaking in the 1950s and '60s and an influential lobbyist for a revived



Publicity for one of MUFS screen - ings premiered unseen, Bresson's Diary of a Country Priest.

Australian industry in this period. As one former member has suggested to me: 'we did all this, because no one else was and we didn't know we couldn't'.²

Approaching the 50th anniversary of its campus progenitor, the Melbourne Cinémathèque was alerted in 1997 to the MUFS papers in the University Archives by film historian Dean Williams, who was researching around the Melbourne-based leftist Realist Film Group, active during the same period as MUFS' foundation. Dean thought there was 'a box or two' of material; we discovered a considerable and fascinating archive of 28 boxes.

These papers formed the basis of the exhibition, 'There's More To Film than the Goldwyn Girls Know', held earlier this year at the University of Melbourne Library. There is an increasing interest, amongst researchers into Australian screen history, in the cultural circumstances in which screen production is received, both by mass audiences and by sections of taste makers and opinion makers (such as critics and filmmakers); and how reception and debate about past productions feeds back into production to come.

It might seem odd for a film exhibitor to be interested in the exhibition of paper artifacts. However the Cinémathèque approached the University Library and Archives with the concept of the exhibition not just to celebrate its half century, but because such an event continued our function in screen culture by other means. These artifacts of our own history offered, we felt, a unique insight into how one subculture watched, argued about and preferred cinema; how it influenced the taste of others and how it contributed to the state of a national film industry through those activities. The only other collection of papers we are aware of which have been explored in the study of Australian cinema, are, by contrast, the personal papers of cinema makers (craftsmen, executives, etc.) and the files of our film making houses and institutions.³

How they came to be deposited remains unclear, although their fascinatingly haphazard,

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Continued from page 7 but unfortunately uncatalogued nature suggests the haphazard nature of MUFS' history — as is the case with most University clubs and societies. The MUFS papers included minutes and financial records; a selection of MUFS and UFG publications and promotional material; material published by MUFS 'research' or film study groups (in the days before academic cinema studies had been established), correspondence related to MUFS exhibition, production and management and some commercial film promotional material supplied to MUFS over the years — including now quite valuable lobby bills and stills. The collection also contains material from other film societies, indicating MUFS links to such organisations as the Federation of Film Societies, the Realist Film Group, the Film Festivals and the Australian Film Institute, as well as a selection of international film journals and clippings.

In preparing the exhibition, the wider holdings of the University Archives proved to also subtly reflect the idealistic interest of post-war intellectuals in the art of cinema. Cinema culture-related material permeates many collections, especially those related to leftist politics, where there was an enduring fascination with the medium's potential for mass political expression. The papers of journalist and academic Hume Dow, for example, include an interesting range of pamphlets and published material regarding the local film society movement of the late 1940s.

The University Archives also holds a number of MUFS production unit titles on 16mm film and video, including at least one title, *Royal Rag* (a fascinating record of Prince Phillip's visit to the University in 1954), which is unique to the Archives. This is part of the Archives' considerable audio-visual collection, which is little known and at odds — as are the MUFS papers as a whole — with its presumed place as only a repository for 'dusty old files'. ❖



Production still, probably from That Green Carnation, short film c. 1967, made for a dental students review.

NOTES

1. More material regarding the anniversary of the Cinémathèque was published in the Catalogue accompanying the exhibition, as well as at the National Cinémathèque's Web site: <www.cinemedia.net/cinematheque>. This includes a memoir of student filmmaking by the renowned director and producer Gil Brealey.
2. Personal conversation with Peter Hourigan, March, 1999.
3. Although a number of similar projects have taken place in the United States, the only possible comparable model, although not entirely satisfactory in its approach, is Peter Mudie: *Sydney Underground Movies: UBU Films, 1965-70*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney 1997.

Archives Supports Local Community Groups

In recent months the UMA has joined forces with several local community groups in support of initiatives to improve preservation and access to archival collections. In two cases we have provided advice and testimonials endorsing applications for funding assistance from the Brunswick Community History Group and the North and West Melbourne Association. The support builds on existing connections with the two, in the former case arising from our holdings of the Brunswick brick tile pipe and pottery manufacturer Hoffman Brick and Pottery Pty Ltd.

Links have also been forged with the Italian Historical Society (Co.As.It) of Carlton, through a joint Australian Research Council funding application involving the Archives, Dr Alan Mayne of the Department of History, and the Society. The application sought funding for a three year Ph.D scholarship to produce a study of Lena Santospirito and an archival finding aid to her papers held by the Society. As the Bulletin was going to press, we learnt that the application was successful. The search now begins for a qualified archivist/historian seeking to undertake a truly collaborative project involving archives, historical scholarship and the local community. ❖