

A man and his Malvern Star

A year before the Melbourne Olympics, well-known long distance cyclist Ernie Old wrote to Prime Minister Menzies with a plan to publicise the Games. The 81-year-old would ride around Australia on his trusty Malvern Star and personally deliver invitations to the State premiers ('we want to make our Games an outstanding triumph instead of a dull failure,' Mr Old writes).

The PM's office loved the idea ('This chap has something') but alas, on this occasion the squeaky wheel did not get the extra grease ('if he dropped dead while delivering notes from you to the Premiers ... you would be put down as a heartless creature').

Contrast this with the reception Pat Farmer received (he collapsed into the arms of a jubilant Prime Minister) as he crossed the finish line in Canberra after his epic Centenary of Federation run around Australia in 1999. What price publicity?

You can see more information about this **Find of the Month** on our website at www.naa.gov.au.



MR. MENZIES/

This chap has something - best suggestion yet for publicity for the Olympic Games -- however, if he dropped dead while delivering notes from you to the Premiers per cycle, you would be put down as a heartless creature!

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Director-General's review of 2005–06

The year 2005–06 held significant achievements for the Archives. A number of major projects were concluded and the foundations were laid for others that will take us forward over the next planning period until 2009.

Resolution of the most pressing challenge facing the Archives was secured during the year with Government approval for the new National Archives Preservation Centre (NAPC). The NAPC will house and ensure the long-term preservation of the nation's archives. The planned NAPC was achieved with the support of our portfolio department and partner cultural agencies. It will provide us with a new state-of-the-art facility and, as well, deliver business efficiencies and lower operating costs. The NAPC is a particularly pleasing outcome as it had been identified as a priority in the Archives Corporate Plan since 2003.

Our experience during 2005–06 confirmed that researchers now prefer to access our collection online rather than by visiting one of

our eight reading rooms across the country. Some 52,000 records were made available in the reading rooms, whereas more than 830,000 records were accessed in digital form via our websites. The Archives has been endeavouring to meet this fundamental structural change in demand by increasing the number of digitised pages available to researchers. In 2005–06, the Archives completed the largest digitisation project we have ever undertaken. More than 376,000 World War I service records were digitised, resulting in more than 12 million digital images which will be available for online access. By the end of the year, more than 14.8 million images were accessible from the Archives' corporate website.

In this way the Archives continued to expand its role of contributing to the development of Australian culture and identity. To continue to develop this role we will need to respond to this shift in demand and direct further resources in coming years to increasing the



Delegates from the National Archives of Bhutan presenting a gift to Director-General Ross Gibbs in Canberra, December 2005.



Director-General Ross Gibbs (*centre*) with Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade representatives Rowan Ainsworth (*left*) and Chris Moraitis, in June 2006 at the opening of *Antarctica: Treaty Territory*, a DFAT exhibition on display at the Archives Hobart Office.

proportion of our collection that is digitised and made available on our websites.

This huge volume of digitised images combined with the growing volume of records that are created on computer ('born digital') need to be preserved and their long-term accessibility ensured. The Archives has designed a working prototype of a digital archive, including the software Xena, which converts digital records so they are accessible regardless of technological change. We need now to secure the resources necessary to develop a whole-of-government digital archive.

The year 2005–06 also witnessed a number of significant developments in relation to recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service. The Archives, the Australian Public Service Commission, and the Australian National Audit Office continued our individual and combined efforts to raise Australian Government agencies' awareness of the importance of good recordkeeping. A particular focus arose from the Archives' strategic review of the recordkeeping systems and practices of the Department of

Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The Department is progressively implementing the review's recommendations. Equally importantly, the Archives commenced development of a new recordkeeping self-assessment tool to help agencies ensure that their recordkeeping practices support their business needs and legislative obligations.

For the past 20 years, the Archives has benefited from the profile given us by the annual release of Cabinet records from the collection. In 2005–06, to complement the annual release of Cabinet records, the Archives introduced a new lecture series, the RG Neale Lecture, focusing on international events documented in records in the collection. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is a partner in this endeavour. The series commemorates Robert George Neale AO, the first Director-General of the Australian Archives.

During the year, the Archives increased its international role, particularly in Asia and the Pacific. This expansion was mainly on a cost-recovery basis and with the support of AusAID. I spoke at, and participated in,

international conferences and other projects in Fiji, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

Financial performance

In 2005–06 the Archives' income was \$76.655 million and expenses were \$70.310 million, resulting in a net operating surplus of \$6.345 million. The surplus arose through the addition of new transfers of records to the collection as assets in accordance with accounting standards.

The Archives received an unqualified audit opinion on its 2005–06 financial statements.

Significant budget pressures for the Archives during the year were managed successfully through rigorous budget management, and the end-of-year financial result was achieved while maintaining services to the public.

The Archives received a Gold Award in the category of 'FMA agencies – Government Departments and Public Service Agencies' from the Institute of Public Administration Australia for its 2004–05 Annual Report.

As a small agency, this was a particularly significant achievement. It was the outcome of a three-year strategy to raise the standard of our planning, budgeting and reporting processes.

This year the Archives is reporting for the last time on the current outcome and outputs structure, having implemented a new framework for 2006–07 and beyond. A new Corporate Plan for 2006 to 2009 has been developed with input from stakeholders. It provides a clear statement of our business directions over the next three financial years.

The year ahead

The future of the Archives is digital. Recognising, raising awareness and leading the Archives into the digital future will be accelerated with the development of a Digital Strategy Plan providing a vision for the Archives and the broader archives sector. This vision and strategy will be delivered in partnership with other archives (the Australasian Digital Archives Alliance) and other Australian Government agencies.

The future of the Archives is also, of course, our staff. As we look forward to the second half of the current decade, it is clear that the Archives is in the same position as many other Government agencies with a growing exodus of retirees. There is a risk that significant expertise will be lost with their departure. In response to this and other staffing pressures, the Archives is undertaking a major workforce planning process. Without these steps to retain and secure committed and skilled staff, the Archives would be exposed to unacceptably high risks to its ongoing mission.

I thank all Archives staff for their continuing professional and dedicated approach to assisting in managing the records of the Australian Government and preserving and providing access to the archives of the nation.

Ross Gibbs PSM
Director-General