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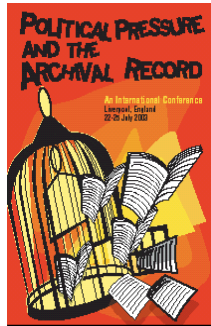
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LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY

# LUCAS



*LUCAS's first international conference took place in July. Mike Steemson, a conference delegate from New Zealand provides an overview*

The conference kept its promise on *Political Pressure and the Archival Record*. After four days' disclosure, review and debate, delegates faced the horrifying realisation that there is a lot of it about ... more than many knew. They were stung into determining to do more to help archives and records management professionals resist it.

The delegates, from Britain, the USA, Japan, Taiwan, South Africa, Australia, the Netherlands, Germany, Botswana, Belgium, New Zealand, Slovenia, Mozambique, St Lucia and Norway, called for, among other things, an international register of "events involving ethical and professional problems" kept up to date with the wide range and extent of the political horrors. The Liverpool conference disclosures could form the core of such a record.

And they wanted to harden international support and defence for record keepers who blow the whistle on unethical and improper actions by their political masters and their recordkeeping charges. They talked of courage, personal risks and responsibilities, of old wars, new scandals, threats, repression, and of passive and active resistance. And they realised that politicians are not the only political antagonists for recordkeepers.

The Liverpool conference was not just a smooth, academic discussion of ethics from the high, moral grounds. The presenters spoke out strongly despite, in some cases, facing personal censure from their own organisations for the disclosures.

Professor **Masahito Ando** has worked with the Department of Historical Documents at Tokyo's National Institute of Japanese Literature since 1977, as a professor there since 1988. He revealed to delegates the wholesale looting, destruction and concealment of records by Japanese aggressors in Asia and the Pacific during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The invaders had not only caused serious loss of life and property, he said, but had destroyed "the foundation of people's memory" in the region and in Japan itself. He warned: "The arguments of Japanese nationalist academics who deny or distort the facts of Japan's war crimes profit by this gap in its history." It was a brave statement, one for which he risked not-inconsiderable social and academic displeasure back in his community, but he went on.

He exemplified a junior high school history textbook, approved by Japan's Ministry of Education in April 2001, whose authors "put forward such unacceptable arguments as to deny or distort facts of Japan's war crimes, taking advantage of the lack of records or even finding their reasons in the non-existence of records." He appealed for establishment in Japan of the concept of archivists as "keepers of society's memory" and pleaded for international exchange or repatriation of records to help the nation build a true memory of itself.

Disposal of evidence of war is not the exclusive domain of Japanese Imperial forces. A former Acting Archivist of the United States, Dr **Trudy Huskamp Peterson**, told the conference that the depredations perpetrated by the Napoleonic army were well known and produced the resigned judgement of a 1990's archives repatriation study: "We can't go back and undo Napoleon."

But Dr Petersen recalled Korean archivists speaking of the 1866 seizure of royal manuscripts by the French Navy. Records of the Kuwait Foreign Ministry were taken by Iraq and only returned just before the latest Iraq War. Russian, U.S and U.K. holdings from World War II seizures were still extensive.

International laws to protect seized documents had to be simplified, she said, with recognition given to human rights protection, legal arbitration and document restitution. South African History Archive director, **Verne Harris**, called for what he described as "archives for justice" in the world and in his own republic where, he said; "the imprints of Apartheid remain resilient".

He told of the heady post-Apartheid days, the passing of the 1996 National Archives of South Africa Act after “a long gestation period involving broad-based consultations with stakeholders” providing a blueprint for the transformation of the national archives system.

“Today, this period seems like a false dawn,” he told delegates. He, too, risks home-based retribution for speaking out about later “worrying” amendments to the Archives Act including disbandment of the watchdog National Archives Commission; “growing, ironic” restrictions on archived records under terms of the *Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000*, and the “complex, frustrating and often futile” processes for access to archives of the new nation’s foundation body, Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

He challenged: “In archives, as in society, democracy lives and breathes through contestation. The space for contestation is the holy place where justice happens, if it happens. If archivists eschew this space, then they turn their backs on higher callings and condemn themselves to being merely bureaucrats and functionaries.”

Australian archivist **Chris Hurley** told two stories illustrating the point, one concerning himself when Keeper of Public Record for the State of Victoria in the 1990’s, the other about another, contemporary Australian state archivist. The first discourse concerned his personal battles over apparent breaches of archival statute with Victoria State bureaucrats leading, eventually, to his dismissal. The other was the account of a Queensland Government’s destruction of judicial inquiry records after application to the State Archivist, a still-active political row known as the “Heiner Affair”, after the magistrate whose inquiry was halted and whose records were destroyed.

Hurley’s archival principles also ran him into controversy with bureaucrats in New Zealand where later, for two

years, he headed the national Archives N.Z., and with his Australasian peers over his uncompromising stand on the recordkeeping rights and wrongs of the Heiner Affair.

Now Chief Archivist for an Australian banking group, he insisted it was not enough just to oblige public officials to make and keep full and accurate records. The obligation had to be enforced in some way and meant a benchmarking standard to test archivists’ decisions.

“That is what archivists, like anyone faced by new accountability requirements, find so threatening. It would remove the autonomy they now enjoy to keep or dispose of records entirely within their own discretion.” He added: “I am optimistic that it can be done, less so that the will exists to do it.”

*A memorable event at the conference was a special presentation made at the Conference Dinner to Michael Cook to mark his enormous contribution to the profession nationally and internationally over the years. **Essays in Honour of Michael Cook** had been in secret preparation for a couple of years, and it was clear that Michael was entirely surprised by it. Contributions to this volume were invited from international colleagues and friends of Michael, representing some of the areas to which he has contributed: education and training, records management, standardisation, automation and the role of the archivist in the wider society. Michael’s contribution has been outstanding and we can think of no one more deserving.*

*The volume includes contributions from Francis X. Blouin, University of Michigan; Marcel Caya, University of Quebec; Anne Thurston, IRMT and colleagues from Africa; Masahito Ando, National Institute of Japanese Literature; An Xiaomi, University of Renmin, China; Frank Scheelings, University of Brussels and Patrick Temmerman, Centre for Historical Research, Brussels; Fernanda Ribiero, University of*

*Oporto; Michael Roper, former Keeper of the Public Records; Peter Emmerson, Emmerson Consulting; and David Vaisey, former Keeper of Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library.*

*Essays in Honour of Michael Cook, edited by Margaret Procter and Caroline Williams is available from LUCAS, School of History, 9 Abercromby Square, Liverpool L69 7WZ. Cost: £10 (£8 LUCAS members).*



*University of Liverpool Pro Vice Chancellor Kelvin Everest (r) presents the volume to Michael Cook (l)*

**More on the conference in the next edition of the Newsletter**

*Executive Committee member Sarah Starkey, Maritime Archives and Library, National Museums Liverpool reports on*

### **‘OPENING UP THE ARCHIVES’, 27 SEPTEMBER 2003**

LUCAS, with the support of the North West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, organised a day school at Liverpool Central Library as part of Archives Awareness Month, September 2003. *(The national launch is described below.)*

The aim was to give users an insight into an archive repository and supply some tips as to how to get the best from your local archive service. The day was designed to cover the steps of using archive material; locating the records, using other sources to avoid unnecessary research, getting access to the records in the

repository and finally, actually reading the documents.

After a short introduction to archive repositories in the North West, **Rosie McLure**, Project Manager, gave an introduction to the North West's second Access to Archives project, *Mills, Mansions and Corner Shops*, that will allow users to locate where records are held through [www.a2a.org.uk](http://www.a2a.org.uk)

**Simon Wilson**, Project Manager demonstrated Mersey Gateway, [www.mersey-gateway.org](http://www.mersey-gateway.org), a site containing scanned images of original documents. The project aims to show the history of Liverpool and the surrounding area while highlighting what documentary evidence is available.

After lunch, local historian **Alan Crosby** gave an entertaining talk on 'managing' archivists to get the best out of your visit to a archive repository. His main recommendations were, if you require special access write and ask, if not, follow the rules and be clear in what you want.



When you have located your document, you need to be able to extract information from it. **Caroline Williams**, Director of LUCAS, gave a palaeography tutorial on how to read secretary hand and provided handouts for those wishing to do homework.

The day finished with a tour of Liverpool Record Office, including a look behind the scenes in the storerooms. After checking no one was lost in the 6 miles of shelving we drew the day to a close, having hopefully provided some helpful advice on locating records and using archive services.

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**Michael Cook represented LUCAS at the Toronto conference on**

## THE HISTORY OF ARCHIVES

The First International Conference on the History of Records and Archives, was

held at the University of Toronto in October 2003. This was billed as the first such conference, although in fact it is a subject that has attracted interest, and in which an organised group of researchers already exists, in North America. Curiously, you might think, very little has been done on this topic in Britain, at least in recent years.

Is the history of archives a proper subject? Certainly there are interesting things to be learnt in it. The British contribution at the Toronto conference was on the building of the house in Whitehall, designed by Sir John Soane in 1830, to house the State Papers. It was interesting to see how this, the first purpose-designed archival building in England (Scotland had already got its special archival building fifty years earlier) was laid out and how they expected its materials to be used, especially as this building is no longer there. But highways and byways of history are often of intense interest if they have been deeply researched and new information is well presented. The pages of *History Today* are full of titbits like this. That does not mean that the broader subject— the history of archives — is insignificant.

Some of the other papers at the conference extended the area of interest and possible significance further. For example, a contributor from Spain (Diego Navarro) gave powerfully illustrated examples of uses of personal archives in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. His examples were taken from the records of businessmen, writing to each other with information on trade and markets; from women in love, writing unguardedly of their passions; and government spies, sending in information (frequently inaccurate, as we have come to see is usual) to their controllers. Another example, from western Canada, examined the ways in which school records gave accounts of the children that were strongly contrasted with the same information, twisted differently and giving a quite

different story, as it appeared in the reports of the local government agency. These insights into different aspects of history, though drawn from widely separated parts of the world, could easily be fitted into our understanding of the human experience.

However, over and above these contributions there were others that made grander claims — that here was a subject of wider importance, which ought to receive great attention from the academies, from the public and (above all maybe) from those who control the funding of research. This claim came, for the most part, from contributors who regarded themselves as part of the philosophical movement broadly called post-modernism. Their arguments are often abstract and couched in language that the general reader finds difficult, if not repellent. However, it is not surprising that some academic archivists have paid attention to it, since this is the first time a major philosophical movement has paid attention to archives as such: we might mention Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever*, published in 1996. Put briefly, the post-modernists attack the idea (if such an idea ever really existed) that there is a basis of unassailable certainty in documentary evidence, or on the historical accounts based on it. They emphasise the shifting nature of human activities that produce written evidence, and the variety of ways in which that evidence can be interpreted.

Interestingly, the post-modernist viewpoint is one that throws great emphasis on the way archivists place their materials before the public, and the variety of ways in which users interpret the information they gain from those materials. At this point the discourse (to use a common post-modernist term) comes to examine the relationship between the archives themselves and the finding aids or published texts based on them. The result is to highlight the problem that archivists have always known they faced: the problem of

explaining the provenance and context of the archives to their users. The difficulty has always been that the majority of users have not been particularly interested in learning all the background information about how the archives came to be created, and how the information in them can be interpreted; they have mainly been concerned to identify and examine particular documents.

Together with the post-modernist illuminations, has come the movement towards social inclusion, so that archivists began to see the need not only to bring in new categories of users, but also to seek out the primary sources documenting the life of excluded groups in society – not only excluded groups of people, but types of documentation that have sometimes been devalued. At the Toronto conference this debate centred a lot on some of these: picture postcards, diaries of different kinds, medieval Chinese obituaries, handwritten correspondence. The debate on diaries (are they always archives?) ranged over war diaries (official records compiled in the heat of battle), the diaries compiled by religious sisters to spread information through their order, the personal records of convicts sent to Australia. Most of us enjoy reading a historical diary, yet there is no class of record that demands more in the way of contextual explanation.

We should perhaps accept the reappearance and growth of this subject – the history of archives – for what it can bring to us: more knowledge about how our work has developed, and a better understanding of how to explain archival materials to the user public.

**Elizabeth Oxborrow-Cowan attended**

**A BIT OF A DO - THE NATIONAL LAUNCH OF ARCHIVES AWARENESS MONTH**

Hopefully there are few within the archival community, users or custodians, who failed to spot that Archives Awareness Month was held in September. I was delighted to be invited to the launch of the Month at the Royal Geographical Society and, as I found out, with good reason. The highlight of the evening were the four speakers, who regaled us with tales of using archives

Writer and broadcaster, **Aminatta Forna** described how she traced the truth behind her father's death. Her father, Minister of Finance in Sierra Leone was murdered in the civil unrest when Aminatta was just 11 years old.

Starting with just childhood memories and meagre family archives, she researched records in The National Archives in Kew and in Sierra Leone to understand who had ordered her father's murder and why. Most of the archives in Sierra Leone were destroyed in the civil war. It is remarkable and heartening to think that another account of that country's history has been preserved at Kew.

From the tragic we moved on to the downright bizarre. **Simon Winchester** spoke from his experience of writing the history of the Oxford English Dictionary *The Meaning of Everything* which took him to Broadmoor Hospital Archives to understand the life of Dr. W C Miner. From the 1880s, Dr Miner was one of the most important readers for the first edition of the OED. Described as 'a deranged American

lunatic murderer', he spent 40 years of his life in Broadmoor. He had been compiling the word definitions onto cards but his productivity fell dramatically around the letter Q. The reason for this was unknown until Simon Winchester discovered a handwritten note from Miner's warder in the Broadmoor Archives noting that around this time Miner had cut off his own penis and thrown it in the fire: not the denouement the audience had been expecting.

Explorer and film-maker **Benedict Allen** explained the demanding initiation ceremony of the young men of the Niowra people of Papua New Guinea, a ceremony making incredible physical and psychological demands on those involved over a period of six weeks. However, it was also the mechanism by which the elders of the tribe passed on their knowledge: an oral archive in action. Allen was passionate in his message that a community's history does not survive purely on pieces of paper.

As well as entertaining us with tales of the love letters of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn (kept, through a quirk of history, at the centre of the Roman Catholic church, the Vatican) the redoubtable historian, **David Starkey** also gave a heartfelt and passionate defence of the value of archives. He gratefully acknowledged them as being the foundation of his own career. He then made a vital point which I had never heard before. Man was a historical animal. It was this quality that set man apart from other animals. To strip man of his ability to record and preserve his history was to remove his humanity. A powerful argument indeed.

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Margaret Procter, Associate Director and Secretary,  
LUCAS, 9 Abercromby Square, Liverpool, L69 7WZ**

**I wish to join LUCAS and enclose cheque/postal order for £10 payable to the 'University of Liverpool'**

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