

A heritage goldmine!

Robert Beattie, marketing manager, Australian Archives

High tech, orderly and squeaky clean. These modern hallmarks of the Australian Archives ensure optimum conditions exist for the preservation and storage of documents and photographs.

The Archives primary role is to look after valuable Commonwealth government records for the benefit of all Australians. The Archives controls the transfer, custody and disposal of records and provides free public access to its extensive holdings. It also promotes and publicises its collections through exhibitions and publications.

The treasures

What constitutes an archival treasure largely depends on your passion but for researchers, the Australian Archives' vast collection is something akin to Tutankhamen's tomb!

Some of the prized items include the personal papers of former Prime Ministers including Billy Hughes, John Curtin, Harold Holt, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Gough Whitlam and Paul Keating.

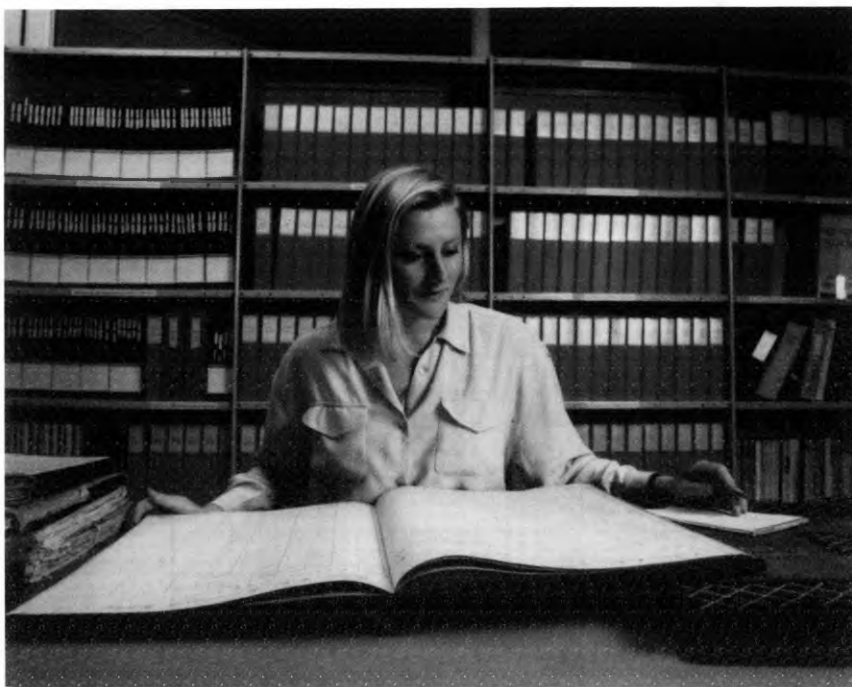
The papers relating to the draft Constitution are pure gold too. They include early drafts, handwritten notes and intriguing ephemera about travel and accommodation arrangements for those at the constitutional conventions.



above: One of the many trademark illustrations held by the Australian Archives

The Archives rich copyright collection contains extensive theatrical material including scripts, programs and photographs from early Australian shows.

Other jewels include Banjo Paterson's application for a military commission in 1915, the design entries



Accessing the records of the Australian Archives. Researchers can usually scrutinise the original files complete with letters, notes and decisions.

for new Parliament House, trademarks of many famous companies such as Arnott's and a beautiful series of Australian National Travel Association posters from the 1930s.

Fascinating as all these things are, they are just a taste of the Archives colossal collection.

Trace your family

Genealogists comprise forty per cent of Archives clients and can usually be found beaver through Archives records searching for snippets of forgotten history and little twigs from the family tree.

The Archives is likely to have something about your family in its collection — with army service records, ships' passenger lists, migrants' files and naturalisation certificates.

If you're researching or studying, the Archives can be a valuable source of material with its Cabinet records, Royal Commission papers, records about Aboriginal people and foreign policy and defence documents. Its four-hundred shelf kilometres hold more than one-hundred-million items!

The Archives also holds more than a million photographs, hundreds of kilometres of film, thousands of plans, and oodles of maps and drawings.

All these records are part of Australia's story and help define our identity, revealing who we are and where we come from.

Using the Archives

The Archives national office is in Canberra but it has offices in each state capital and in Darwin. Visitors are able to use its reading rooms (open from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm) and staff will happily assist you in finding the material you want to see. Everyone has a right to seek access to archives material once it is over thirty years old. If you want to make copies of material a small photocopying fee is charged.

Calling ahead of your visit will allow Archives staff to conduct a preliminary search and confirm the availability of the material you need. The Archives has two data bases to help researchers locate material of interest to them, one of which can be accessed on the Internet.

The Internet address is <http://www.aa.gov.au> and the e-mail address is archives@aa.gov.au. Direct enquiries to the national office in Canberra can be made on (06) 209 3633.

The most exhilarating aspect of using Archives material is that you usually scrutinise the original files complete with letters, notes and decisions as they happened. ■