

Essays in Honour of Michael Cook. MARGARET PROCTER and CAROLINE WILLIAMS, eds. Liverpool: Liverpool University Centre for Archive Studies (LUCAS), 2003. 160 p. ISBN 0-947608-21-4.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the British Air Force was considered by many to be a small and select group, filled with the comradeship drawn from the pursuit of a common cause. In an old joke, the story was that the longer a pilot had been in the force, the lower his service number, which led many officers to reply, when asked for their service number, "Number? What number? My dear, when I joined up, we didn't need numbers. Everybody knew everybody."

Like the British Air Force, the international archival community is, even in the twenty-first century, a small and select group, with a collegiality born of a common purpose: to protect and make available society's documentary heritage. Recently, a number of *festschriften* and commemorative publications have appeared, honouring some of the pioneers and noteworthy thinkers in what many see as a vocation as much as a profession. By honouring Michael Cook with this short book, the archival profession recognizes one of its leaders and celebrates his diverse career and outstanding record of service in the United Kingdom and around the world, including the publication of many articles and several books, such as *Manual of Archival Description (MAD)*, *Archives Administration*, and *Archives and the Computer*.

Intended as a celebration of the honouree, commemorative publications such as this one are not necessarily academic treatises or critical analyses. Their importance is not so much in the ideas they contain but in their acknowledgment of the individual's career and as a reminder of his or her contributions to the profession. In this publication, each author touches on an issue relevant to Cook's life and work, from computerization and electronic records to description, education, and the political role of the archivist. Throughout the essays is a recognition that Cook is an archival practitioner and educator who has always considered the "bigger picture" (p. x), who has blended his professional vision for archives with personal concern for his colleagues, and who has pursued a diversity of interests and issues to the benefit of archives around the world.

In the first contribution, historian Francis Blouin provides an overview of changes in the perception of archives, from a notion of their neutrality and objectivity to the current postmodern sense of their bias and subjectivity. In his case study of the Vatican Archives, he suggests the need for a "more transparent mediation between the archives and the user" in order to overcome the challenges of the "search for truth in the archives" (p. 11-12). Archival educator Masahito Ando then discusses the political role of archivists, offering examples of lost and displaced records of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific. He urges the creation of stronger professional networks of Asian

and Pacific archivists to conduct cooperative studies on “lost memory” and lost archives.

Ando’s contribution is followed by Frank Scheelings and Patrick Temmerman, archival practitioners and educators in Belgium, who examine the challenges of electronic records management systems and consider the realities, and conflicts, of an interdisciplinary approach to records management. Next, Fernanda Ribeiro, professor of archives at the University of Oporto, Portugal, takes a broad look at the issue of archives versus records management in the teaching milieu and the effect on education of attempts to harmonize different disciplines.

An Xiaomi, associate professor of archives at Renmin University, China, looks at the impact of Cook’s publications in that country, demonstrating by her own contribution the continuity of learning in archives, as she – a former student of Cook – carries his torch forward in her own teaching. Also important in her piece is the acknowledgment that translations of seminal publications to and from English and other languages is essential to the growth of the profession worldwide.

The reminiscences from Anne Thurston, Yonapika Yonaz Shaid, Mwanahamisi Mtengula, Pino Akotia, Festus Khayundi, T. M. Lekaukau, Cletus Asangweo, and Nathan Mnjama – all major figures in African archives – demonstrate Cook’s impact on the profession in the developing world. Thurston emphasizes not only the professional impact of Cook’s work but also the value of his consistent personal support, and that of his wife Margaret, for their archival colleagues in Africa. The testimonials of the other African contributors highlight Cook’s comprehensive and “futuristic” vision of archives (p. 83). As Khayundi notes, Cook’s emphasis on computerization generated “spontaneous scepticism” during his time as an instructor in Africa (p. 83) but now his African colleagues are facing – and coping with – the challenges of electronic records predicted by Cook decades earlier.

Marcel Caya, an archival educator in Québec, compares descriptive standards around the world, including Cook’s *Manual of Archival Description*, with *International Standard Archival Description ISAD (G)* in order to determine whether existing standards are likely to support international information exchange about archival holdings. Contemplating the future of works such as *MAD* for the twenty-first century, Caya suggests that, until the content element of various descriptive tools is standardized, the amalgamation of national databases could result in “a modern equivalent of the Tower of Babel” (p. 103).

Michael Roper, a senior statesman of archives and former Keeper of the Public Records in the United Kingdom, looks at the history of the International Council on Archives’ (ICA) work on automation, including discussion of the different ICA committees and the efforts of archivists such as Cook to address the challenges of automation. Roper notes that the members of the

committee “became something of a family” (p. 113), highlighting the cooperative and collegial nature of archival work and reminding us of the contributions to the profession of leaders such as Cook.

David Vaisey, a librarian and archivist whose career has been as eclectic as Cook’s, demonstrates the *plus ça change* reality of archives. Noting that the computer seems to have brought the greatest transformation in archival practice in the twentieth century, Vaisey reminds us of Cook’s prophetic knowledge about the role of the computer and stresses his own belief in the importance of the archival role to acquire and protect archival records and make them publicly accessible. Peter Emmerson, another senior figure in the field and the author of many publications, looks at the evolution of records management in the United Kingdom, highlighting the role of “strong people” such as Cook (p. 133) in widening professional thinking about the importance of quality records care. Emmerson underscores the importance of education and training for records management and laments that, even today, “progress is painfully slow” (p. 150).

Each piece in this book offers a taste of the different topics that interested Cook during his career and that remain relevant to archival work today. A weakness in the book – inherent in a *festschrift* or commemorative publication – is the brevity of each contribution and the inability of the authors, in the space available, to provide more detailed and complex analysis of fascinating issues. The pieces are tasters and readers will want to draw on the references provided to seek out more information about these challenging topics.

Another unfortunate gap in the publication is the absence of a bibliography of Cook’s writings. Many of his works are cited throughout the essays, but it would be so valuable to readers to have access to a consolidated listing of his works. Perhaps the editors will consider adding such a list to the Liverpool University Centre for Archive Studies (LUCAS) Web site?¹

Throughout this publication, one is struck by the spirit of collegiality, friendship, and co-operation fostered by professionals such as Cook. Contributors praise his wisdom and vision, his ability to remain current in a continually changing environment, and his quiet, gracious, and unassuming presence – a man, it seems, more interested in action than accolades. The editors, Margaret Proctor and Caroline Williams, colleagues of Cook and educators at the University of Liverpool’s archive studies program, are to be commended for bringing together a work that honours a valued colleague and also provides readers with insights into a range of topics worthy of more investigation.

Praising Cook’s work, Cletus Asangweo reminds us that “what an old man sees sitting down the young man cannot see standing” (p. 86). A publication such as this should be read not only by those who have worked with or are familiar with the career of Michael Cook but also by those new to the field, to

1 <www.liv.ac.uk/lucas/research.htm, last viewed on 26 January 2004.

remind them of the history of our field and the important work done before their own appearance on the scene. A work such as this also encourages us all to maintain a collegial and supportive professional community, one where “everybody knows everybody.”

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Moving Archives: The Experiences of Eleven Archivists. JOHN NEWMAN and WALTER JONES, eds. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002. 124 p. ISBN 0-8108-4500-8.

...the transfer of graves and the movement of archives
may seem unusual, but they have much in common.

Moving Archives: The Experiences of Eleven Archivists is a 2002 release from Scarecrow Press containing eleven essays dealing with the trials and tribulations of moving archives, most of which were initially presented at a joint meeting of the Northwest Archivists, the Conference of Intermountain Archivists, the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists, and the Northwest Oral History Association in 2001. It is fairly short (124 pages) and easy to read, with a brief preface, and an “about the contributors” section. Unfortunately, it has no index.

Nine of the eleven essays recount the moves of university libraries with their archival collections, specifically the University of Utah’s Library and Special Collections Department; the Colorado State University Archives; the Northwestern University Archives; the Brigham Young University Library; and the University of Colorado at Boulder’s American Music Research Center. While these essays do dominate the publication, the remaining two essays vary slightly in topic, recounting the emergency move of the Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration records, and the move of religious archives such as the Redemptorists’ archives move in Denver.

The primary focus of the book is, of course, moving archives or, as the editors put it, “to provide an initial piece of professional literature in what we hope will become a growing body of modern information about moving archives.” Moving archives – the task, is a challenging endeavor. By implication, it usually involves the move to a new space, and the need for some, if not considerable, facility planning; the management of a sometimes large budget, both for the new facility and for the move itself; and the move of staff and accompanying infrastructure such as desks, phones, computers etc., as well as the move of holdings – the records and books. In short, there is much to discuss and explore in a book on the subject of moving archives. Unfortunately,