

Managing Archives: Foundations, Principles and Practice . CAROLINE WILLIAMS. Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2006. 248 p. ISBN 1-843-341 12-3.

In deciding whether or not to read this publication, you may ask yourself several questions. You might wonder whether the archival community needs another basic manual. You might ask why a British handbook has relevance to Canadian practice. And you would be asking good questions. But it would be a mistake to overlook this title solely on these counts. In terms of content and approach, Caroline Williams's work fills a unique niche and provides updated and relevant content to guide archival practice.

There is a clear distinction in this manual between theory and practice and how they should work together . Williams acknowledges the difference; in fact, this is her field of study , and her proficiency in making this distinction allows her to clearly base her practical approach to any given archival function on a solid theoretical foundation. ¹ She does this extremely well in her very eloquent introductory chapter , which gives an orientation to basic concepts. In subsequent chapters, she offers a good explanation of the pitfalls of arrangement and nicely outlines various appraisal methodologies, in both cases drawing together internationally varied approaches. In the preservation chapter, she provides practical solutions for environmental and other problems. While solid, this advice is not necessarily anything new , and certainly

1 See Caroline Williams, "Studying Reality: The Application of Theory in an Aspect of UK Practice," *Archivaria* 62 (Fall 2006), pp. 77–101.

exists in a myriad of other manuals, bulletins, and websites.

In addition, and perhaps new for an archival handbook, Williams articulates a business context for administering archives and brings management theory into the archival realm. She accomplishes this by clearly explaining the business cycle, by using concrete business examples, and by stressing the importance of advocacy. However, she could perhaps have provided more guidance in some areas, such as how to start an archival program and how to use an archives policy, not just how to develop one.

Possibly the most pleasant success of this publication is its readability. It is not simply geared to be dipped into on specific issues (although this certainly would work), but can be read from beginning to end as a solid primer on archival theory and practice.

All of this being said, there remain a few weaknesses in the content. One omission is a more extensive discussion of professional ethics. Williams deals with ethics vis-à-vis collecting, but could have included more on ethics and professional values. This absence is especially significant as the manual is geared to readers who may not be coming at archives from a professional perspective.

Archivists responsible for institutional archives may find their particular situation somewhat neglected. They are covered in the dialogue on acquisition mandates; however, any specific mention in other functional areas, such as description, is missing. Williams clearly recommends following *ISAD(G): International Standard Archival Description* and other associated standards, but does not give a strong discussion of these in contrast to other approaches such as the series system, which may be of value in the institutional-archives setting.

Williams's examination of electronic records focuses entirely on preservation; granted, that may be the largest issue, but in doing so, she has neglected their management at other crucial stages of the archival endeavour. Even preservation-wise, her simplification of the solutions to electronic records issues may be misleading (see especially the table on p. 192).

While the manual contains an extensive bibliography, it may have been useful to include a glossary. Certainly there are many excellent glossaries available, and even had Williams drawn from existing definitions, it would have been useful to have them at hand in the same volume.

In terms of Canadian content, the book scores fairly high. Canadian practice is referenced in discussions of total archives and the *Rules for Archival Description*.² Archives Canada, the on-line portal to archival resources in

2 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa, 1990-).

repositories across the country, is mentioned as an example of access, but it may be that Williams goes a little overboard in her detailed analysis of the United Kingdom's access agenda. It has little relevance to Canadians, and one wonders if the level of detail is even useful for UK archivists. Library and Archives Canada is cited for its combined private/public acquisition model and preventive preservation policy, as well as a merged national library and archives. It would have been nice to see a more complete discussion of macroappraisal (although it is neatly summarized in a page of the chapter on appraisal and is covered in the extensive bibliography); a mention of the preservation management work of the Canadian Council of Archives; or reference to the findings and recommendations of the University of British Columbia's InterPARES project concerning electronic records. However, the most glaring snub of Canadian work comes when Williams summarily brushes off the word *fonds* as "obscure archival terminology" (p. 100). Even though this may be true on some level, the term is clearly in active use not only in archival descriptions in many countries, but in the great body of archival literature. She may be doing her readers a disservice here, not to mention that her use of the word "collection" may cause some Canadian archivists to pass a sleepless night or two.

Williams outlines her target audience clearly at the outset: "It is aimed at those who are starting out as archive professionals and need a basic handbook; at students on archives, records, museums, library and information programmes who are seeking an introduction to the discipline; and to anyone who has taken responsibility for archives but without any prior experience" (p. 1). Williams's manual fills a niche between the fairly theoretical Australian manual *Keeping Archives*³ and very practical manuals like the Archives Association of British Columbia's *A Manual for Small Archives*.⁴ It finds a place somewhere in between, giving nuanced discussion for the student of archival studies and for the more senior practitioner, but offering clear solutions as well. Some of the dialogue and the content may be more than what a volunteer archivist needs, particularly in the managerial section. Williams takes a tone comparable to the Society of American Archivists' Basic Manual series, but provides a work that gives a broader international perspective and tidily summarizes complex and nuanced archival theory, as well as a work that is much more concise and affordable.

3 There have been two editions of *Keeping Archives*: Ann Pederson, ed., *Keeping Archives*, 1st ed. (Sydney, Australia, 1987); Judith Ellis, ed., *Keeping Archives*, 2nd ed. (Victoria, Australia, 1993).

4 Archives Association of British Columbia, *A Manual for Small Archives* (Vancouver, 1988, 1994, and 1999), <http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/msa/> (accessed 10 September 2007).

Overall, the publication is a great introduction to archival work. Caroline Williams provides a solid theoretical explanation of archival principles, as well as concrete examples for her practical advice.

Johanna Smith
Library and Archives Canada