

# Archive Strategy

**STATE RECORDS**  
of South Australia



**Government of South Australia**  
State Records

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# Looking forward

**In 2019 State Records of South Australia celebrates its 100 year anniversary. This is a time to reflect and celebrate what has been achieved, but more importantly it is a time to look forward and establish the foundations that will see the government archive prosper over the next 100 years.**

This strategy considers the challenges and opportunities that are known to us and outlines a broad direction for the government archive. It reflects, at a high level, the aspirations and directions of the agency as it relates to the identification, preservation and accessibility of government records of enduring value.

The outcomes we aim to achieve will be further defined through our annual and four year planning cycles.

The official records of government have importance to South Australia and its people. More importantly, some of those records have a value beyond the purpose for which they were created. These records provide an insight in to how the State was managed through successive governments, the impact of government policy on the social fabric of the State and at a personal level, how government decisions and interventions impact the lives of South Australians. It is these records of government that form the archive – an enduring memory of South Australia.

In 1919, the South Australian Government recognised the importance of government records to society by appointing the first government archivist in the nation. A century later, government records are more important than ever to the collective memory, rights and entitlements of our community. At a time when government services are transitioning to online platforms supported by increasingly large data stores of personal information, the management and identification of those records that have enduring value is more pressing and complex than ever.

This is not something that State Records can achieve on its own. Achieving the outcomes described in this Strategy will require the participation and collaboration of many parties including State and Local Government, third party service providers, stakeholder groups, professional associations and the general community.

This Strategy has been influenced by the thoughts and views of our customers, stakeholders and the broader community. This is important as the archive is a resource for all, one to be used and valued by present and future generations of South Australians.

**Simon Froude**  
**Director and State Archivist**

# Future challenges and opportunities

## **We cannot predict the future, however, we can look at current trends and issues and imagine how we might need to position ourselves for what lies ahead.**

We know we need to address the challenges of the digital age. Government agencies have been creating digital records since the 1970s and we need to ensure government has the means to preserve and make accessible digital records of enduring value. This requires significant investment in new technology, skills and processes, as well as ensuring agencies understand how best to make the transition from hard copy to digital records as they transform their business operations.

There is increasing public demand for access to government information, and it can be a challenge for South Australians (and people further afield), to identify the whereabouts of current and historic information, and to then navigate the various mechanisms and channels through which information is released or restricted. For some people, such as Aboriginal South Australians and care leavers, government can hold the key to their identity, their family, their place, and it is critical that we facilitate access for these people.

We have the largest physical archive in South Australia, and one of the largest in Australia. The physical archive needs to be kept indefinitely, and is likely to continue to grow for at least the next 20 years. This requires ongoing investment in suitable facilities for its preservation and accessibility, and to allow for predicted growth.

The world changes rapidly and State Records, like every other organisation, must embrace these changes and seek out opportunities. As a public sector agency we have a responsibility to act with integrity and to manage our resources responsibly, just as we have an obligation to reduce our impact on the environment. While these responsibilities are not discussed in detail in this Strategy they will underpin every decision that we make.

The records in the South Australian government archive belong to the Crown (or the agency which created them) and are an important resource for government, industry and individuals. As the custodian of that material we must protect and manage it as best we can within our resources.

# Context

## Number of agencies we support



## Size of our collection

84 kilometres



13,344,838 items



## Our responsibilities

records **custody**  
management  
**digital** disposal  
**standards** access  
preservation awareness  
**records** repository  
guides enduring or  
informational value  
**future reference**

## Challenges of digital

Records created since

1970s

Formats

may have become obsolete



Created in business systems, personal email accounts, or network shared drives



Data may not have been migrated



Increased volume of digital records



Increased risk to personal privacy

# Vision

**Our vision is that the archive is valued, actively preserved, readily accessible and managed sustainably.**

Through this Strategy we seek the following outcomes for the archive:



## Valued

Our first priority is to ensure the archive is valued by those who are impacted by decisions about what records are kept or destroyed. Not all information can be kept forever. Our expectation is that only a small percentage of information created or collected by agencies will be kept as an archive. That is the information of enduring value, providing reliable evidence of government activity.



## Preserved

Once we know which records are valued, we must focus on preserving those records as effectively and efficiently as possible. There are several categories of records at risk: digital records created in the 1970s to 1990s which have not been migrated to new formats and systems; nineteenth and early twentieth century records held in inappropriate storage facilities; and analogue media such as nitrate film and audio tapes which are rapidly deteriorating and will not be readable in the near future.



## Accessible

There is little value in preserving records if no one is able to access and use them. The archive belongs to the State, and the community should benefit from it. Archives have infinite uses: whether to trace the history of a family, structure or place, for scientific research, to establish personal rights and entitlements, or to review how government policy has impacted our society. Yet many records, even today, are not created or collected with an expectation that they will be accessible or published in the future, and so we must ensure there is transparency regarding how government information is, or will be used.

# A valued archive

## What are archives? Criteria for what to create and keep

Governments, through the decisions they make and the services they provide create ever increasing amounts of information. However, we cannot keep all information forever. In fact, we usually only keep a small amount of all information created or collected by government. This information, which has enduring value to the State and its citizens, is the archive.

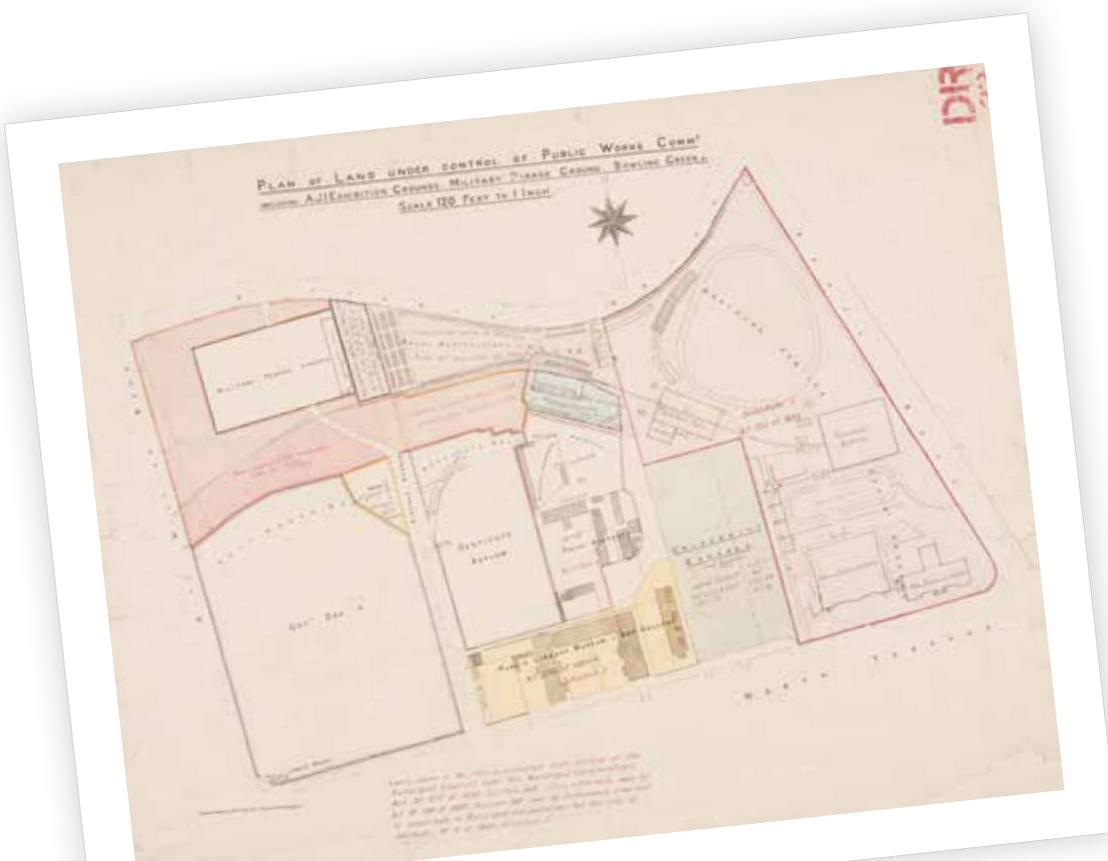
We expect agencies to manage the remaining records, and to destroy them when they are no longer needed for business, legal or accountability purposes.

Since 1925 South Australian legislation has required approved disposal of government records. We need to ensure information of enduring value is not destroyed without approval and that other information is not retained unnecessarily as part of the archive.

Deciding which records are created and kept (a concept known as appraisal) is based on understanding the business, legal and social requirements for records. As public and government expectations and needs change, the criteria for what is kept must be reconsidered. It is important that we consult on the criteria that will establish what the archive looks like in the future and make sure the appraisal objectives are unambiguous.

Being transparent about which records we aim to archive supports our accountability.

Agencies create and collect records daily as part of their operations and services. Current appraisal objectives do not focus on which records agencies should create, however this is important advice that should be broadly understood and applied consistently.



*Plan of land under control of Public Works Committee GRG 35/585/26*

## Archives are not just old, nor dusty

It is a myth that archives are old and dusty volumes housed in basements. This is rarely the case.

Records created in digital format today are tomorrow's archives, especially where they have enduring value for future generations.

Many digital records are held in business systems or databases. These systems often register transactions, and provide a useful summary of government activity. We must partner with agencies to preserve these databases so that the information they contain remains accessible as long as is required.

## Applying and monitoring the criteria

We need to apply appraisal criteria in a consistent way. This means justifying the ongoing retention of records, and publishing these determinations so that the decisions are transparent.

The application of this criteria needs to be understood by those making the decisions, and we have a responsibility to assist agencies and consultants to gain the skills and experience necessary.

We also need to monitor that the records kept meet public and government expectations so that the archive remains a relevant and valuable State asset.

## Making and keeping records about people

Many State and local government records contain information about people. Some of these records have enduring value. We need to consider the implications for these records being part of the archive.

We routinely protect personal privacy through access restrictions applied to archives. However, there is an opportunity for agencies to consider what personal information they collect and to make it known when personal information may form part of the archive. This could extend as far as seeking input from individuals as to what is recorded or enabling individuals to contribute to the official record.

This is a developing and complex policy area with many competing interests. We need to engage with the community to understand their views.

## Promoting the archive

Many South Australians do not know the archive exists or the value of the records we hold. Many would also be unaware how they can access the archive, or that access through our Research Centre and to the records we publish online, is free.

Increased promotion of the archive and its relevance to society and individuals is important. The centenary celebrations of 2019 provide the perfect foundation for raising the community's understanding of the archive.

# Preserving digital, analogue and paper records

## Preserve digital records at risk

Digital records of permanent value are likely to be at risk of not remaining accessible or even surviving over the long term, without proactive intervention and the availability of a digital archive.

Given digital records have been created since the 1970s we need to gain an insight into what digital records exist and are at risk, and explore options for preserving these records.

We need to work with Government to develop a digital archive capability for South Australian agencies and local councils, potentially to also preserve and maintain accessibility to long term temporary records, reducing the need for each agency to develop their own long term archiving solutions.

## Ensure agencies manage permanent value records effectively

As records can be identified as having permanent value from the moment they are first created, and yet should not be transferred to our custody until no longer needed by the agency, they need to be managed effectively by agencies in the interim. For digital records, it is likely that some agencies will manage these archives themselves, rather than ever transfer them to our custody.

We must establish clear and practical guidance for agencies and local councils to follow with respect to managing any permanent value records in their custody, including digital records, and ensure third party storage service providers meet standards for physical and potentially digital records. We also need to work with Government to ensure that agencies have access to adequate storage for physical and digital records while they hold them.

## Convert analogue media to digital

The risk to audio visual records on analogue media such as magnetic tape is widely recognised. Statements such as *Deadline 2025: Collections at risk* (published by the National Film and Sound Archive in October 2015) encourages collecting institutions to convert records to digital formats for preservation and access.

We need to explore options for converting analogue audio visual records in our custody to digital formats by 2025. We also need to advise agencies on how to do this for similar records in their custody.

## Minimise loans of archives

State Records is required to provide agencies with prompt and ready access to their records, however this must be balanced against the need to preserve these records for future generations.

We still handle a large volume of loans of archives to agencies. This is because records were transferred that are still active or because they are closed to public access and the agency must loan them in order to provide access.

Archives can be lost or damaged through transportation and handling, or may be added to by agencies or have their integrity compromised. Generally archives transferred to our custody should not be retrieved by the responsible agency except in rare circumstances. We need to consider how we can minimise the loans of nineteenth and early twentieth century archives (those over 50 years old) which are at most risk of damage or loss.

## Prioritise transfers of archives

For physical records, we must ensure that only inactive records of permanent value are transferred to our custody. This is critical to ensure that we do not function as a semi-active storage provider, competing with commercial storage businesses and diverting resources from our core responsibilities.

We must give high priority to proposals to transfer records that date from the nineteenth or early twentieth century, as these records are likely to be rare and at greater risk of physical deterioration. We will also prioritise transfer proposals for permanent records that are over 15 years, unless they are still likely to be active, or there are other factors which suggest the agency is better placed to continue to manage them.

We must delay accepting transfers of records which have long term public access restrictions (more than 30 years) until the records are closer to being publicly available. This is because we cannot provide public access and agencies must therefore loan the record, which increases the risk of loss or damage. We must also stop accepting transfers of physical records which are duplicates printed from digital format, or which have been converted to digital format as part of a routine business process, and where the agency has adequate digital records which can be managed within the future digital archive.

## Deaccession records that are not of permanent value

We continue to manage some records in our custody which do not belong as part of the archive. This is because between 1980 and 2002 we provided storage for semi-current temporary records and records whose value had not been assessed. Some of these records of temporary or unknown value were not returned to the responsible agency when we ceased providing the temporary storage service.

In other cases, records were previously identified as having permanent value, however, this decision needs review given the benefit of hindsight and greater knowledge of the records and their context.

Whilst it is acceptable practice to re-appraise records, and remove or deaccession records which we do not believe have enduring value, we must be careful to ensure we do not simply apply current thinking to historic records in our custody. Removing records from our custody must be handled on a case by case basis, arranging for their destruction or return to the responsible agency.

## Provide optimal conditions for physical records

Physical records deteriorate over time regardless of their format. Steps must be taken to slow the deterioration by maintaining physical records within optimal temperature and humidity ranges and by reducing the variation in environmental conditions. Physical records also need to be kept in clean, secure facilities with minimal risk of damage from natural or human elements. Continuing to provide for the preservation and conservation of the archive supports our responsibilities to provide access for future generations.

We maintain two repositories, one of which has temperature and humidity control (although these systems are ageing) and one repository which only has temperature and humidity control for 25% of the records.

As at 2019 there is only space for approximately 8 years growth (at an average annual growth rate of 1300 linear shelf metres). The need for additional physical space to manage the archive should slow as State and local government move to digital recordkeeping, however, the need for a physical archive remains, and we need to understand the volume of physical archives held by agencies that are likely to come into our custody.

We need to plan for investment in future facilities well before reaching capacity in current facilities. Any facility would ideally have good public transport links to ensure researcher accessibility, provide a single location for the physical and digital archive, as well as accommodation for all staff, and facilities for research, preservation and exhibition.

# Balancing access and privacy

## Increase online access to digitised records and catalogue data

Customers of archives increasingly expect online access to digitised copies of records.

Arrangements with third party providers such as FamilySearch to digitise open access records relating to life events (such as passenger lists and school admission registers) need to be expanded if we are to meet customer demand. We also need to explore opportunities to convert microfilm and microfiche to digital format to reduce our dependence on ageing technology.

Digital images of physical archives are accessible via the FamilySearch website. We provide access to the images in our Research Centre and some are accessible via our website or through Flickr. We need to explore platforms for publishing digitised records so that they are easy to navigate and view, ideally linked to our catalogue.

## Replace our catalogue

Our archival catalogue system and the online public interface are at end of life. These whole-of-government systems document the history of the South Australian government (including local government) and enable agencies and the public to search, find, and request to view records.

These systems are at risk of ceasing to work with modern operating systems. We need to explore options for replacing these systems as a matter of urgency to ensure that researchers, agencies and staff can locate, order and access records in the archive. We will consult with users of the archive as part of the work to replace these systems, to ensure they meet public, agency and staff needs.

*State Wards  
from 1913 State  
Children's Department  
Annual Report*



## Open more records

Agencies are responsible for consulting with us to set access arrangements for records in our custody. There is an expectation that most records will be publicly accessible at some point, as sensitivities in the record content diminishes with the passing of time. We need to provide clear guidelines to agencies around making access decisions, to ensure that records are not restricted longer than necessary.

There are many records in our custody that do not have their accessibility determined. We will consider implementing blanket access decisions, by agency or record type, to clarify the access status of these records, which should result in many records becoming open to public access.

We also need to make sure we open records to the public as access restrictions cease.

Where records contain sensitive personal or confidential information, these will continue to be restricted in accordance with current community expectations and government policy and legislation.

## Improve the description and indexing of records

With approximately 84 shelf kilometres of records in custody, the level of description and indexing of the records varies considerably. This can limit access to the archive, especially for remote researchers, as searching for specific information can be time consuming and often requires physical inspection of original records.

Records transferred since 2004 are mostly described at the individual file folder or volume. Records transferred prior to this may only be described at the box level (i.e. the range of items within the box) or at the consignment level (i.e. the number of boxes of those records received at the one time). Some records are not described at all.

Many records are not indexed. In some cases the original index used by the agency is accessible, and this can often be used to find a relevant record. In other cases the agency may not have maintained an index. Some high demand records have been indexed by staff and volunteers to provide better access. Some organisations and individuals have also indexed records in our custody. Records which are being digitised and published by FamilySearch are being indexed.

We need to look at ways to increase the number of indexing and description projects, and establish capacity to enable online transcription and indexing so it can be undertaken remotely, without people having to attend the Research Centre.



*Group of Aboriginal boys with football Point  
McLeay GRG 52/45/128*

## Link up collections

Records in the archive may be related to other South Australian or wider collections. For example, the photographic portraits we hold of South Australian soldiers, sailors and nurses who took part in World War One could be linked to dossiers of Australian servicemen and servicewomen held at the National Archives of Australia. Similarly the digitised passenger lists we publish could be linked to data about passengers and ships on the South Australian Maritime Museum Passengers in History website.

We need to ensure that our replacement online catalogue and digital images can be linked to other collections, as platforms, standards and technology better enable federated access.

## Facilitate reuse of digital images and metadata

Digital humanities scholars and other researchers are increasingly exploring the re-use of digital images of archives and the metadata which describe the records. One example of the re-use of archival records is the Founders and Survivors project which is a partnership between historians, genealogists, demographers and population health researchers, largely based on the Tasmanian convict records. Where possible, we need to liaise and partner with researchers to identify sets of South Australian records which have potential for re-use.

The South Australian Government, through data.SA, encourages agencies to open data in order to unlock opportunities for our community and economy. Open data has the potential to empower citizens with information, advance research and enable new business innovations. We should ensure that any digital images and metadata we publish relating to the archive are accessible to the widest possible audience as part of the Government's open data efforts, in formats that facilitate creative re-use by the community. In doing so, we must ensure we respect any intellectual property in the content.

## Reach new audiences

Part of the goal of promoting and marketing the archive is to reach new audiences and ensure we maintain engagement with these and existing audiences.

For example, by making teachers aware of the resources available for student learning, as part of the Australian curriculum, we can potentially benefit students across South Australian schools.

An important part of our role is to provide services to Aboriginal people in the spirit of Reconciliation and to assist them to access information about themselves and their family connections. We need to continue to engage with Aboriginal communities, particularly across regional and rural South Australia, to ensure as many people from these communities know what information is available and how to navigate access to it.

# Implementation

**The Archive Strategy is broad in its vision and scope. State Records, in partnership with government and community groups will need to work closely together to fulfil the targets we have set ourselves.**

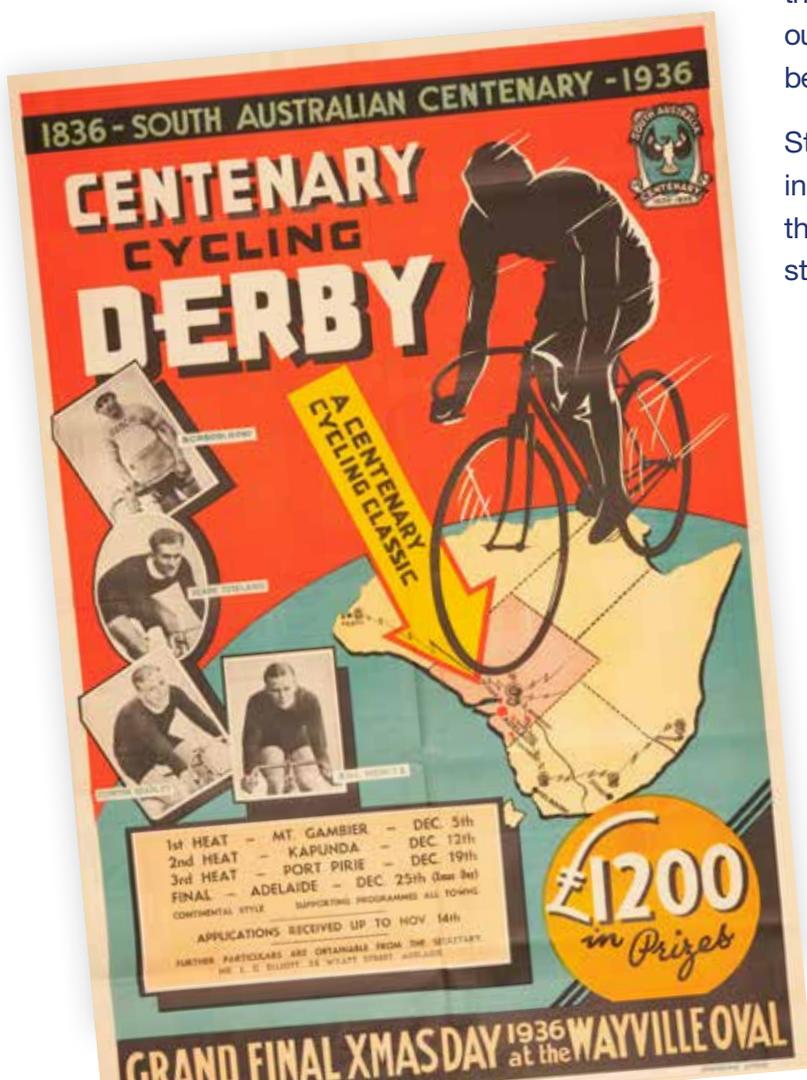
These targets and outcomes will be further defined through our annual and four year planning cycles as well as through associated documents such as our *Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022* and the *South Australian Government's Information Management Strategy*.

Annual business plans will also articulate what we expect to deliver and the approach we will take to meet our strategic goals.

It is important that State Records continues to invest in its people, as without our professional and dedicated staff we will be unable to meet our objectives. We will continue to provide staff with opportunities to learn and develop new skills and to improve collaboration across the agency in order to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Our relationships with external organisations is equally important, and State Records will continue to build partnerships with professional bodies, industry, consultants and key stakeholders. We must work hard to nurture these relationships and we must also position ourselves to be able to advocate for the betterment of the archive and the profession.

State Records must also continue to invest in technology and process improvements that support and enhance our customer and staff experience.



*Poster for the 1936 Centenary Cycling Derby GRG 49/7/64*

# Need further assistance?

## **Contact State Records**

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