The strategic rebuilding and repositioning of UNSW Canberra Special Collections 2014 – 2018

Rose Holley, Special Collections and Digital Curator

VALA2018 LIBRARIES/ TECHNOLOGY AND THE FUTURE// 13-15 FEBRUARY MELBOURNE CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

Good morning, it is my great pleasure today to talk to you about my work at the University of New South Wales over the last three years.

I must apologise because my talk is not very technical, it's more of a strategic case study.
I'm not quite sure if you will find it to be a cautionary tale, or an uplifting and
inspirational story. I hope the latter.

Let me set the scene for academic libraries. Fundamental changes took place and a combination of unique factors occurred together as listed on this slide. This was widely considered to be of a perfect storm that was both a detrimental and calamitous situation for libraries. A global re-thinking of the value and reason for libraries to exist and what exactly they would do began to happen. Libraries were under pressure to cut back, post the global financial crisis, and some thought they had outlived their usefulness in the golden age of Google.

However for those able to adapt the storm offered a unique opportunity to re-position and change academic libraries.
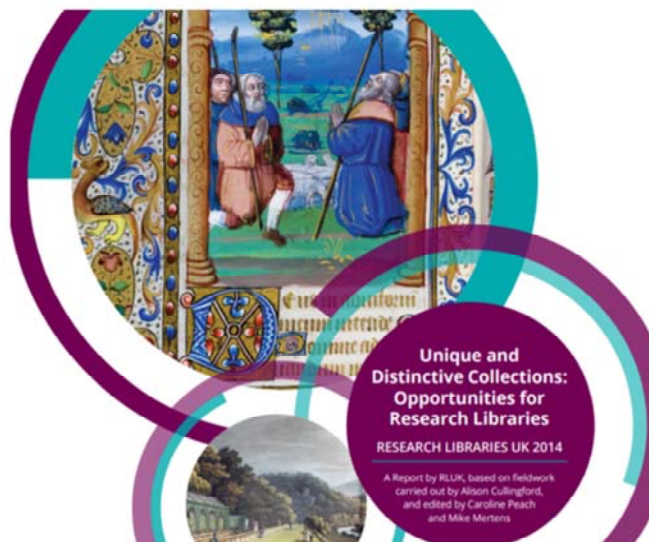
By 2013 some library leaders were beginning to formulate and articulate revised ideas for our existence and value and there was a shift in strategic thinking. This was the year that Rick Anderson (now University of Utah Librarian) wrote a report on the declining importance of library books and the rising importance of Special Collections. He suggested that University libraries should use our skill set wisely and start focusing on curating the unique and special collections that need our expertise, rather than the commodity items that we all share and have like physical and e-books.

2014 Unique and Distinctive Collections [UDC]

RLUK 2014 Report Key Points

❖ Use the term UDC

❖ Measure and articulate 'significance'

❖ Point of **differentiation**

❖ Engage more with digital humanities

❖ Engage with business and economy

Unique and Distinctive Collections: Opportunities for Research Libraries

RESEARCH LIBRARIES UK 2014

A Report by RLUK, based on fieldwork carried out by Alison Cullingford, and edited by Caroline Peach and Mike Mertens

4 Reference: 2009, Russell and Winkworth, Significance 2.0, Collections Council Australia
Reference: 2014, RLUK, Unique and Distinctive Collections

UNSW CANBERRA

In 2014 the Research Libraries UK Group, published a pivotal report. One of the recommendations was that we should not call ourselves Special Collections but Unique Distinctive Collections, and neither should we be Curators but instead Head of UDC. This phraseology has been widely accepted now in USA and UK, though not so much in Australia.

Recommendations included measuring and articulating our collections of significance. The report waxed lyrical about how advanced Australia was in doing this. The Collections Council of Australia had published a guide called 'Significance 2.0' for the GLAM sector in 2009.

It was suggested that Special Collections could be used to **differentiate, leverage and position yourself against other organisations**.

It was against this backdrop that critical thinking about Special Collection began at UNSW Canberra in 2014.

Thirty years ago a Special Collection had been established at UNSW Canberra at the Australian Defence Force Academy. It had a team of 5-10 people and was held in high regard for its Australian literary manuscripts and its work on creating the AustLit Database. However things changed in 2002 when the Curator left and a decision was made to not replace the role and scale back the team then close the Special Collections. For over 10 years the collection was largely inaccessible and invisible, though the collection remained intact on site. Discovery metadata about the collections was removed from the NLA national bibliographic database and the UNSW website.

In 2014 senior leaders at the campus had taken an international trip to visit Special Collections in USA and UK, because they felt they had a unique opportunity on their hands.

Shortly after I saw an exciting new job of Special Collections and Digital Curator advertised, with the remit to strategically rebuild the Special Collections in the digital age.

The first three lines of the job description got me sucked in:
- Develop and implement proposals for the curation, digitisation, discoverability and dissemination of manuscript and digital resources.
- Develop and manage a digital program that increases and enhances discovery, access, preservation and delivery of the collections and services.
- Lead and manage a team of skilled staff to specify, design and implement agreed innovations and proposals.

It was not clear to me at this point what a critical state the collection was in, the amount of work that would be involved to re-establish it and that the skilled team did not exist.

The individual collections that make up the 'UDC' seemed very promising and were a rather eclectic mix of literary, military, and Prime Ministerial records and manuscripts. These included physical, digitised and born digital.

And so it was that I found myself a few days into the new job standing between Kerry Stokes and John Howard and being led into the library under a guard of honour. Not your average start to the average job – but nothing about this job has proved average, everything is unique or special.

We kicked off to a flying start in 2014 with the opening of a Special Collections reading room in the Academy Library attended by 90 VIP's including Canberra's top military brass, politicians, government officials and University staff, with full media coverage. Expectations were running high and the pressure began immediately.

The reading room was named after the Honourable Mr John Howard (ex Prime Minister) due to us having custody of his collection from the National Archives of Australia. This was the first unique and unusual strategy and partnership, which suited both organisations and led to great deal of media interest and 6 further events with John Howard in the Reading Room. On this first day client access was also re-established with the launch an online enquiry service.

Special Collections Strategic Plan 2014-2017
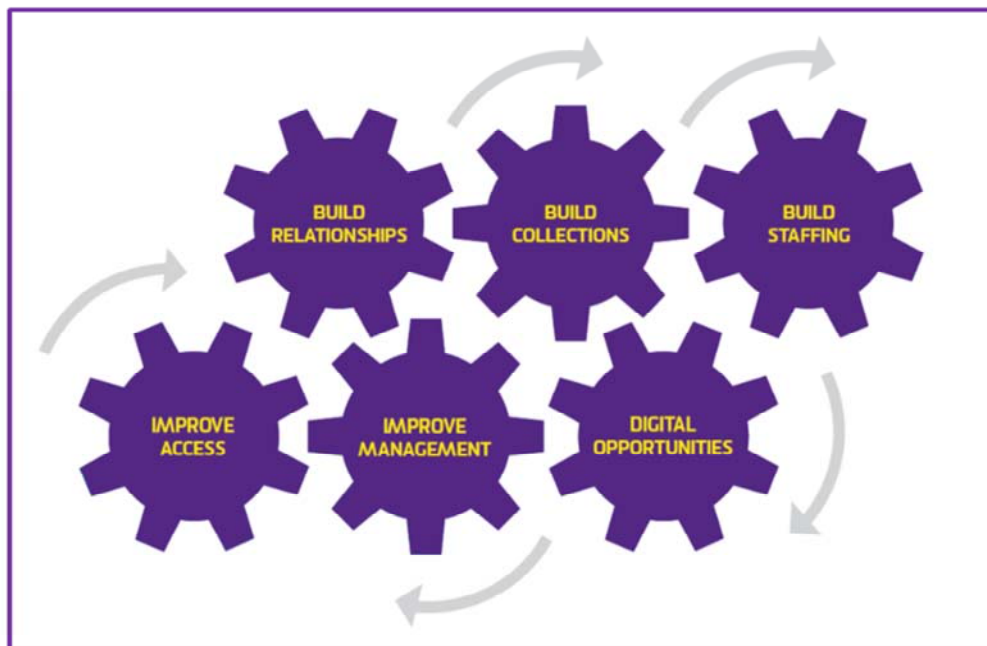
This big flourish was not exactly matched behind the scenes with capability, there being no policy, procedures or team in place. Also the other senior position of UNSW Canberra Librarian had been vacant for 6 months and I needed to assist covering this.

I very quickly established a grand 3 year strategic plan to re-position and re-establish the Special Collections. The strategic work plan had a programme of activities and projects that each related to a key theme as represented by the cogs in the diagram. It was really clear to me that I would need to advise, influence and negotiate with the Senior Management Team on campus to help them understand 101 of Librarianship/Archives Management.

Before any significant digitisation work could begin key things needed to happen such as:
- **Secure** the physical and digital collection in repositories and on servers
- Establish **control** at collection level of manuscripts including – boxing and barcoding
- Understand **what we had**, both in size and content
- Improve and expand **storage space** and conditions
- Develop Governance – **policy**, and procedure
- Gain **staffing** resource
- Implement core **digital infrastructure**
- Create **metadata**
- and gain Institutional support at the highest level

It was very challenging to prioritise work because everything was inter-related and co-dependant, like the cogs in the diagram, and in the ideal world needed to be done consecutively. Failure to undertake one item may bring everything to a grinding a halt. Although we were not attempting to undertake significant digitisation in this time, we did intend to leverage any digital opportunities that came along.

The biggest issue and the highest risk factor was the lack of storage space, and inadequate storage conditions. This required the most time, money and energy to fix.

A Special Collections team was not established but instead assistance of key library staff was provided for three years, which was invaluable.

I am now going to show you some of the achievements and progress made. This does not cover everything, since we don't have time, its just the highlights.

Firstly as priority we needed to re-establish the online discovery pathways to our unique manuscripts.

We established four discovery pathways.

This began by adding collection level records for our manuscripts to our Library Management System ALMA which appeared in the UNSW Library discovery layer PRIMO.

Then we had these records harvested into Trove.

We salvaged some of the old EAD Finding Aids as text files. We added them to a static webpage by using a Drupal template.

The webpage is indexed by Google, meaning that most of our clients find our material direct via Google, rather than our Library search portal or Trove. Where possible we added links in the Finding Aid to Wikipedia biographies.

Digitisation on Demand 2015

MS 313 James Romney, 1777

I'm so excited to have a scanner!
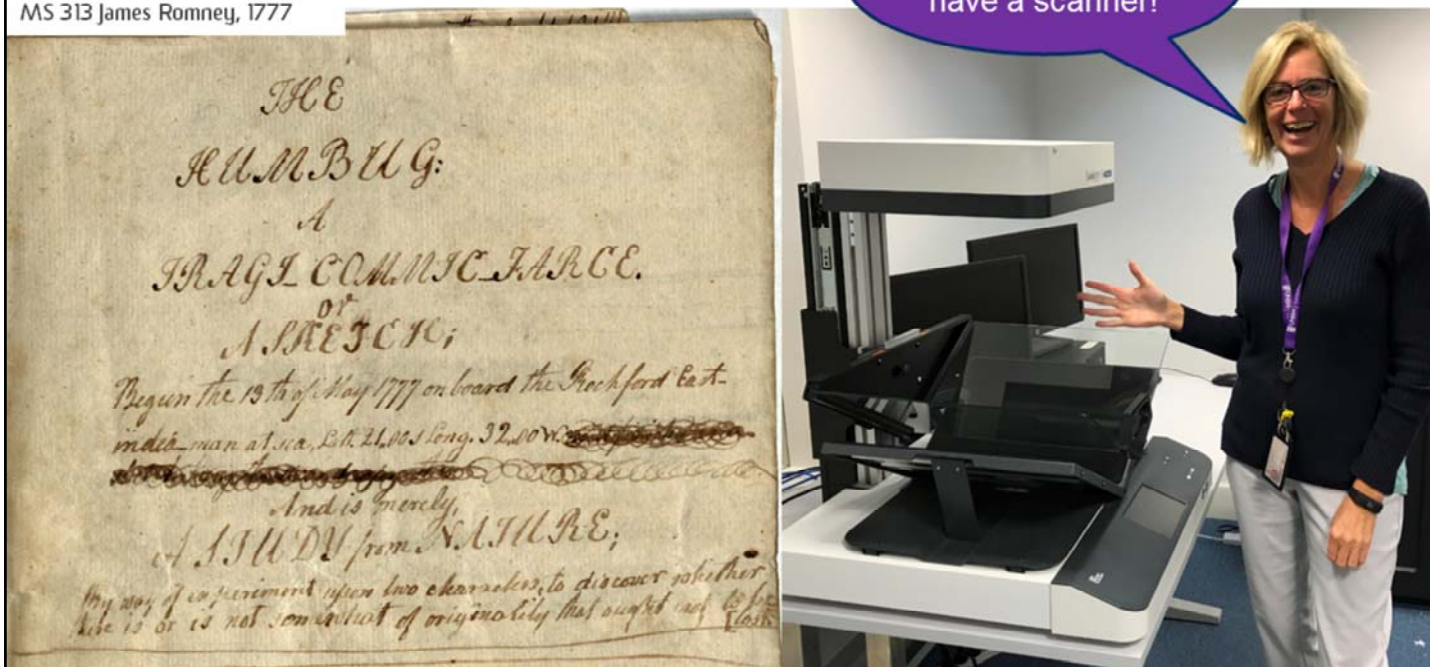
The next priority was to improve the client experience. We implemented an Access Policy enabling any client, not just UNSW PHD students, to access and use the collection. I encouraged clients to take their own copies with personal devices, if copyright conditions allowed, and academics were very excited about this, since it meant they walked away on the spot with digital copies at no cost, and it gave them a similar service to other institutions.

At the same time we offered digitisation on demand, so that clients would not have to travel to Canberra and could be supplied digitally. Many of our clients visit inter-state or internationally. We got an immediate request from a researcher at the National Humanities Centre, USA to copy the James Romney collection which is a collection of plays written by a British naval officer on board ship in 1777. The other half of the collection is in the British Library.

In 2004 while working at the University of Auckland I developed a digitisation framework for organisations, which is as valid today as it was then. We were on shaky ground because we did not have most of these elements of this Framework diagram in place, so I had to be inventive about how I could undertake projects. My main strategy was to collaborate with those in a better position than ourselves and form partnerships.

Digitise World War One Diaries

STATE LIBRARY
NEW SOUTH WALES

ANZAC —2014-2018—
CENTENARY

UNSW
CANBERRA

16 MSS 183 Sturdee and MSS 64 Saunders
https://www.unsw.adfa.edu.au/library/centenary-world-war-i-commemorative-program-0

Images courtesy SLNSW

UNSW
CANBERRA

The ANZAC Centenary was quickly approaching and we held several WW1 diaries of significance. We entered into a partnership with the SLNSW to digitise, store and deliver our diaries, which was really helpful.

Two significant diaries were of Colonel Alfred Sturdee and his son Sir General Vernon Sturdee. The father Alfred was not able to join the Navy because of a minor finger disability, and so strangely instead was able to become a ships doctor and surgeon! He was on the first hospital ship anchored at Gallipoli the day prior to the Landing on 25 April 1915. He writes about converting all the decks into operating theatres in readiness, and also about visiting his son Alfred who was on a different ship also in the bay prior to the landing. Father and son both remained at Gallipoli until the final evacuation in 1916 and both survived World War 1, which is rather unusual, with their diaries cross-referencing their meetups.
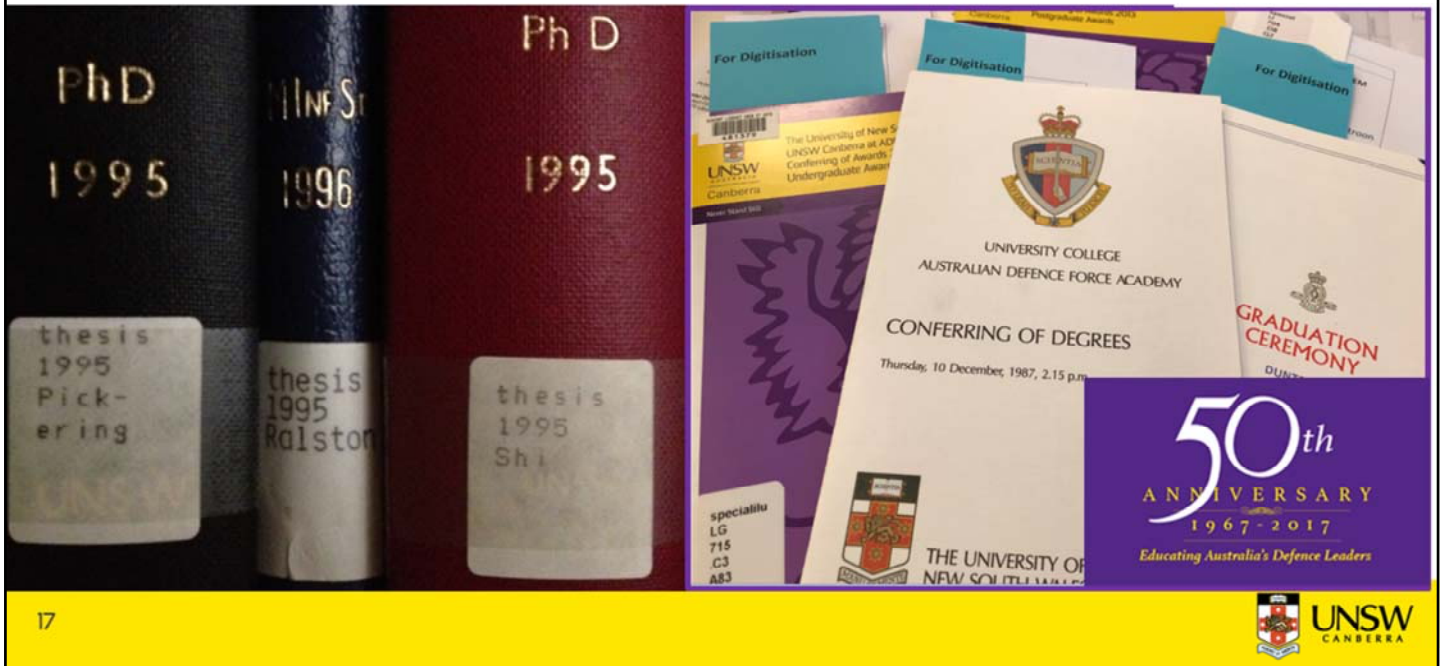
We then turned our interest to digitising our high use physical items such as theses and UNSW Canberra publications. We did a joint project with the UNSW Records and Archives and Kensington Library for the 50th anniversary of the UNSW Canberra campus.
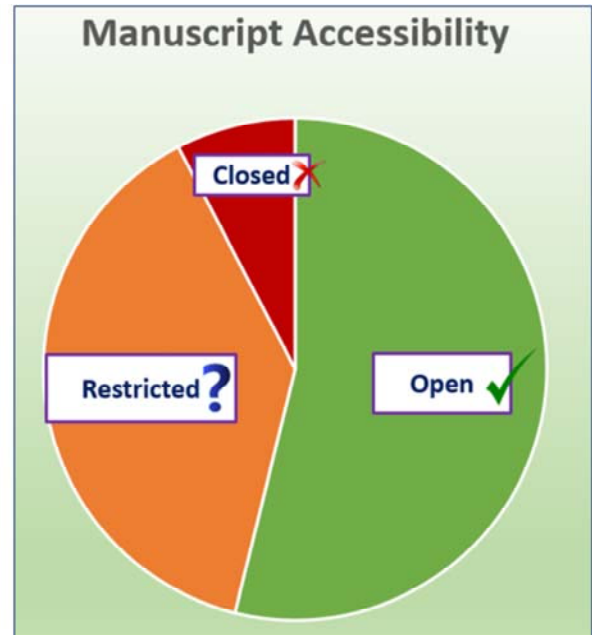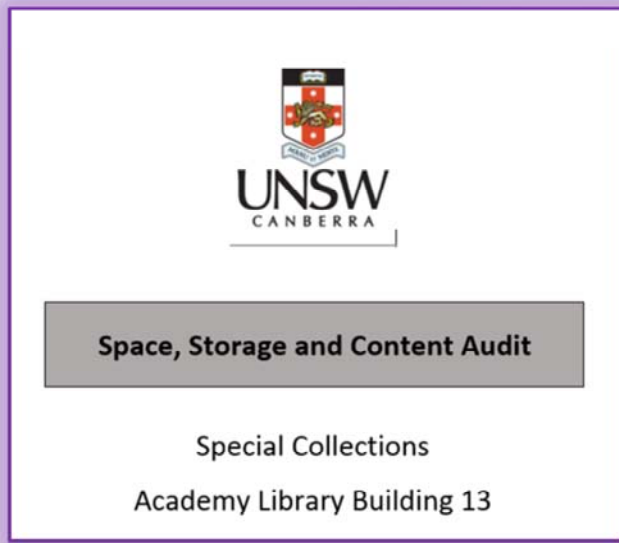
Space and storage was a constantly worrying issue and basic questions such as how much content do you have, what is it, how much is accessible and how much space do you need had no answers. The most significant piece of work I undertook was an audit of the space, storage and content. The findings were that we had 3km of content which was approximately 3 million items and that the building was in a critical state. The findings were a shock to the senior leaders especially the restricted level of accessibility which had not been previously known. The amount of resource needed to address the issues, which was in the millions of dollars, caused senior leaders to revisit their decision to re-establish the Special Collections. This re-visiting proved to be invaluable since it raised awareness at the highest levels of Special Collections and the opportunities as well as challenges they presented. A firm decision was made to continue re-establishing the Special Collections, with the aim of using it as leverage for research.

The audit proved pivotal and created significant outcomes.

A UNSW Infrastructure research grant was competitively won by academics seeking to use the collections. The grant enabled more of the manuscript collections to be opened.

Cool Room: AV + Data

Audit of Audio-Visual and Data Content in Special Collections Cool Room

42 different data and AV formats
Good condition - relocated

At the same time we needed to close the Cool Room repository for various reasons. We took the opportunity to undertake a condition and format audit of the Audiovisual and data content before moving it. The National Archives of Australia, Sydney office kindly provided us with specialist staff to do this.

Environmental Control: Humidity and Temp

An audit was then done on the environmental control system, which was broken, to understand options and costs for implementing a new system to manage humidity and temperature in the repositories. The project to implement a system was funded and is nearing completion.
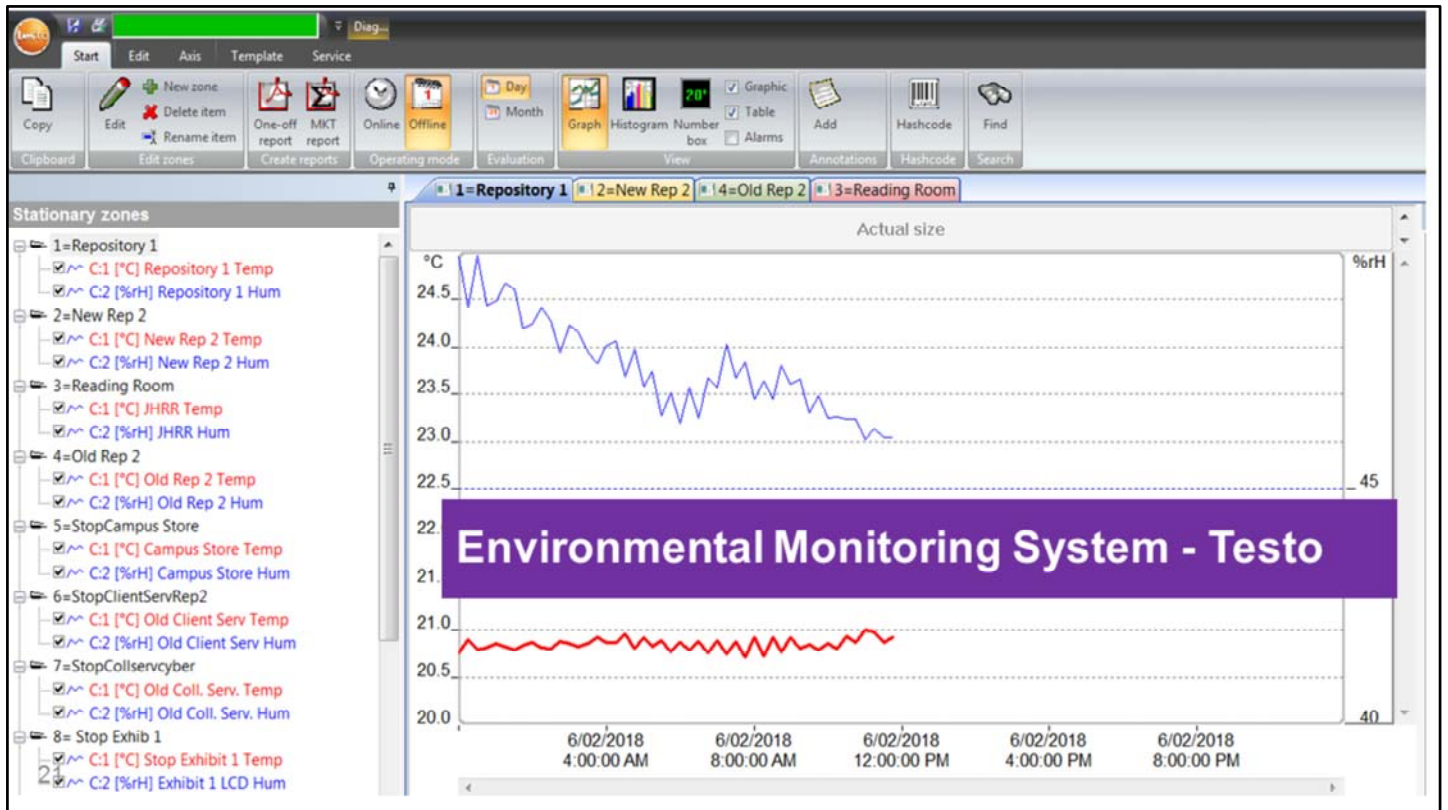
Prior to this I had purchased and implemented an enterprise solution for environmental logging, so that the repository areas within the library, or any other building on campus could be monitored and compared. This gave traction to my request for needing environmental control implemented and the ability to build a case based on actual data. The system Testo has excellent graphing capabilities, and alarm and alert notifications if temperatures or humidity go out of agreed range.

Prepare for collection emergencies

It's like being in an episode of CSI!

DISACT

The environmental conditions were unsatisfactory and general maintenance, cleaning, and pest control were also a concern. Identified collection risk included bushfire, flood, mould and pest. Library staff were trained in disaster preparedness, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was supplied to staff. The help, advice and support I received from the ACT Disaster Heritage Collections Group DisACT was invaluable. The group is made up of 26 national collecting institutions based in Canberra for example the National Library, Archives, Museum, Gallery and others.

Shelving specification and fit out

Now we are up to year 3. This was the year that it was agreed to refurbish a suitable area of the library and convert it into a repository. I spent 3 months working with a shelving consultant preparing feasibility and design layouts. The National Library and the Defence Library Service were very helpful in sharing their shelving compactus specifications with us.

Moving to off-site storage

In preparation for the building work we needed to move more than half the collection off site. We re-boxed a lot of items, barcoded boxes, palletised them and sent them to local storage facility shared with the National Gallery of Australia, and the CARM facility at La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Building new repository

It took another 6 months to convert what had been a library office space for staff into a customised repository. This included demolition of walls, covering of windows, taking the floor back to concrete, laying tracks and manufacture and install of compactus. APC completed this work for us.

Policy	Plans
• Access • Copying and Charges • Reading Room • Collection Development • Digitisation	• Strategic • Operational • Disaster Preparedness • Digitisation • Storage
Procedures	**Audits**
• Client Access • Digitisation and Risk • Donations	• Environmental Control • Space and Storage • Content and Formats • Valuation

In between all of the practical projects I was continually writing and establishing policy, plans and procedures and audits so that Special Collections had a governance framework under which to work, and library staff had procedures and guidelines to follow e.g. for client access. On a weekly basis a range of complex operational issues and questions were arising. The depth of knowledge both written and tacit that had been lost with the Special Collections team 10 years before was hard to overcome and was one of my greatest frustrations and sadness's in this time.

Challenges	Solutions
1. Defence own campus (land, buildings, fixtures).	UNSW prioritised and paid $$
2. ADFA own military base and ICT network.	Move to UNSW network and cloud and wait.
3. UNSW Canberra self-governing entity. Canberra Library is independent of Sydney Library, except for sharing ALMA.	Partner and collaborate where feasible for support and help. Become Faculty of Sydney.
4. No digital library infrastructure for managing and delivering manuscripts, digital and AV assets.	Still working on it – temporary solutions. (ALMA, Trove, Drupal, Cloudstor, SLNSW)
5. Loss of knowledge, staff, skills.	Share of library staff. Develop knowledge as you go and record and document.
6. Re-establishing everything at once, prioritising, keeping going…..	Review, revisit, resilience, support networks.

As a case study we need to pause and examine the challenges, solutions and lessons learned. 4 of the 6 key challenges related to the unusual governance situation at UNSW Canberra.

1. Defence own our **real estate** – that is our campus, both the land and buildings and their maintenance and upkeep. Government cutbacks had resulted in a much reduced maintenance and new works programme that was largely re-active rather than pro-active, and was often a slow and cumbersome process to work with. The solution to this was that UNSW prioritised requests for work on Special Collections, above all others, consistently for two years, and offered to pay for half of the works to ensure they got done. I project managed the contractors directly. This reduced some of the bureaucracy.

2. The Australian Defence Force Academy is a separate **entity** and the campus is a **military base** with its own **ADFA ICT network**. At the beginning we had a hybrid ICT infrastructure that was not part of UNSW Sydney. This had good points and bad. In 2017 there was a project to move all services to the cloud and become part of the UNSW network (including email, active directory and storage), with the majority of the ICT team at Canberra being disbanded. This was a big and disruptive change over a long duration which meant that it was not a suitable time for scoping and implementing new systems and storage. The solution was simply to wait until the change concluded.

3. UNSW Canberra was and to some extent still is, a **self governing entity** like an Oxford College because of the special relationship with Defence. This means that the Canberra Library is **not a branch** of Sydney as you would expect but actually a separate entity. Since 2013 the two libraries have shared a single instance of ALMA, but otherwise do not share common library services, staff, policies or procedures. Sydney Library do not have a Special Collections. We collaborate together and sometimes enter in project partnership e.g. digitising theses, but sometimes organisational priorities vary.

4. There was and still is no existing **digital library infrastructure** in place for management, delivery and storage of archives, digital assets and AV. I put temporary solutions in place and will be working on long term solutions in the next phase.

5. The previous loss of so much **knowledge** of the collection, processes and governance was perhaps the hardest challenge of them all. All we could do was develop knowledge of the collection and establish governance as we went, making sure to record and document wherever possible. The Canberra Library provided some staff resource to Special Collections which really helped with the re-establishment, especially the cataloguers.

6. Re-establishing everything at once was also very challenging since everything seemed to be inter-linked and required at the same time [cogs diagram]. It was sometimes hard to prioritise tasks, especially on top of new projects being thought of. It was easy to lose focus and feel overwhelmed and exhausted, so it was important to review and revisit at regular points and have good resilience techniques and a professional support network.

The Lessons that the senior campus managers learned were about collection management and sustainability.

Often the managers were not at all aware of basic collection management or the tools and resources needed for this. I was often providing lessons in 101 of archive management. For example secure, house, control, catalogue your collection before starting to digitise it. Also you want to make sure you are digitising the best bits, so you need to know what those are first, and if you don't know you will need time to find this out and scope projects and workflows.

2. Sustainability (Three legged stool: commitment)

digital curation

technology (how?)

organization (what?)

resources (how much?)

Digital and physical Curation requires a **significant**, **long-term organisational commitment** and **holistic** approach rather than a project based short term view.
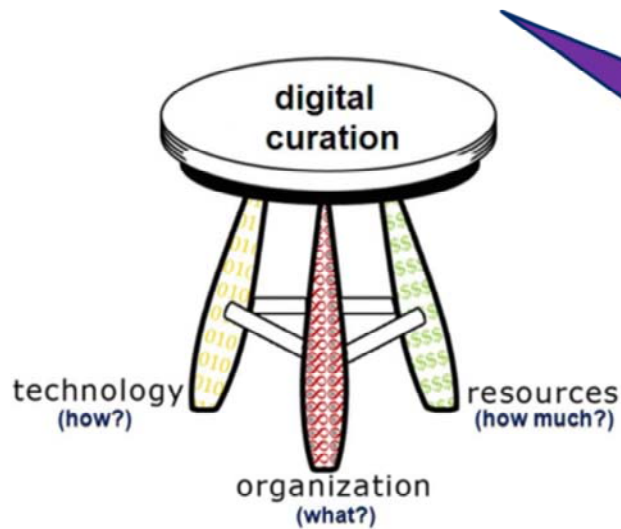
Adapted from: Kenney and McGovern, 2003

29

UNSW CANBERRA

Expectations of time and staff required were consistently unrealistic.

My ongoing take home message for senior managers was that of the three legged stool analogy that I learnt from Anne Kenney and Nancy McGovern during my digital preservation training – and the same applies for Special Collections. Sustainability means an ongoing commitment of

- Resources like experienced, skilled staff and money
- Digital infrastructure and technology
- Organisational support commitment and governance

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2018-2021

I didn't mention that during the last 2 years and for the next 5 at least the whole University has been and is still going through a rapid and extensive change management process. This has offered many new opportunities for strategy, alignment and funding for research. We developed a Special Collections Strategic Framework that aligns and maps with the UNSW 2025 Strategy and intend to use this as a tool for continuing our re-positioning and discussing priorities and funding with academic leaders.

Future Plans 2018 - onwards

Rose needs this!

- Appointment of Associate Dean for Special Collections ⭐
- Recruitment of Special Collections Team
- Making manuscript collections more accessible (processing collections)
- Digital Humanities research

Big digitisation projects:
- John Howard Collection for National Archives of Australia

DIGITAL LIBRARY INFRASTRUCTURE

- Archives Management System (Atom vs ArchivesSpace)
- Digital Asset Management System
- Digital Object Storage
- Digital Delivery (Full text: OCR, HTR, Artificial Intelligence, Crowdsourcing)
- Digital Preservation

Final Slide.

With the 3 year strategic plan coming to an end we have been back to the drawing board to try and establish where to from here. The last three years have been largely inwardly facing, and limited activity has taken place engaging researchers with the collections. The academic leaders at the University believe that since the Library exists to support and move the University forward then they should define the role of the Library and Special Collections at the University.

Therefore the University Rector made a strategic decision recently to structurally separate the Special Collections from the Library and create a new academic position called Associate Dean of Special Collections. This role will have strategic oversight for developing and shaping the role of Special Collections within the digital humanities research community and establishing philanthropic activities. The Associate Dean will also oversee the appointment of a Special Collections team. I will support the Associate Dean in their role.

My plans include establishing a digital library infrastructure, which what I was originally appointed to do. I have been scoping archive management systems and delivery systems (Atom and ArchivesSpace). I still have a particular interest in full text search technologies such as OCR, HTR (handwriting text recognition), transcription tools, artificial intelligence and crowdsourcing. These are of particular relevance since in our partnership agreement with the National Archives we will be digitising the John Howard Collection and aim to make it full text searchable. How we do it may become a model for the NAA to follow.

[Speak to extra notes on having an AMS, Finding Aid issue and full text searching if time…+ Risk management for rights access and digitisation at item level]

It has taken an enormous amount of sustained commitment, energy, passion and perseverance, for me to get Special Collections to this point. At several stages it felt as if we were going to fail, the task I had been given was so daunting and overwhelming and so little understood by senior managers. I would like to acknowledge the many professional people in my network, librarians, archivists, and conservators who have helped me on the journey, both with practical advice and personal support. These connections have been invaluable in helping achieve success and a bright future for UNSW Canberra Special Collections. Thank you for listening! Any questions?