Mixed Material: Investigating the management of archives in New Zealand museums

by

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Abstract

Research problem: With a third of New Zealand archives collections held in museums, this study is concerned with the way in which archives are managed in a museum setting, particularly with regard to the convergence of archival principles and museum practices. The primary research question of the study is; how are archival values maintained in the management of archives in museum collections? In answering this, the study explores the processes or procedures that collection managers employ in order to preserve these values, and the challenges they face in doing so.

Methodology: This study employs a qualitative approach to addressing the research problem. Semi-structured email interviews were conducted with a selection of archivists working in New Zealand museums. Approaches to museum archivists to participate in the research resulted in responses from seven archivists.

Results: An unexpected limitation of the study was the small sample population of museum archivists. With regard to the management of archives collections, the study found that museum archivists face unique challenges and tensions in carrying out arrangement and description within museum-based cataloguing and information systems.

Implications: With very little literature currently addressing these issues, this research makes a valuable contribution to the dialogue around the management of archives in New Zealand. In particular, it provides an understanding of some of the challenges of working with museum archives collections in New Zealand, and the means with which archives collection managers negotiate some of the differences between archival and museum practice. The research also acknowledges that despite these differences, the exchange of knowledge across disciplines can influence the development of new approaches to the means and methods by which New Zealand heritage is preserved and accessed.

Keywords: archives, archivists, museums, collection management, New Zealand, thematic analysis.
1. Introduction

The goal of this study is to investigate how archival values are acknowledged and maintained in the management of archives held in museum collections in New Zealand. Museum collection management practices have traditionally focused on the specific requirements of object management and preservation, although documentary heritage is an increasingly important concern of collection management within a museum context.

This study is specifically concerned with the founding principles of archives management, that is, provenance and original order, as they apply to a museum context. It is also concerned with the acknowledgment of archival values in a museum setting.

There are at least 47 museums in NZ that hold what can be considered significant archives collections (Archives NZ, 2009), making up around 30% of the country’s archival repositories (Archives NZ, 2008). Archives New Zealand's Community Archives Survey Report 2007 identified skilled training as an important priority for archival repositories. It is suggested that for those museums holding archival collections, this lack of appropriate archives-based knowledge and training may be an even greater consideration.

A qualitative research strategy was applied to the study. This enabled a close investigation of how museum professionals address the unique characteristics of archives management, including the maintenance of archival values, within a museum context.
2. Definition of key terms

**Museum:** This study adopts the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and Museums Aotearoa definition of museums. “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2012).

**Collection:** For the purposes of this study, collections are defined as groups of material – both tangible and intangible – that are purposely acquired, organised, described and preserved and that form a meaningful whole. Collections differ from the archival concept of *fonds* in that their individual parts do not necessarily originate from the same source; their significance to the collection is not contingent on their provenance.

**Archives:** are defined as records (produced either by an organization or individual) that are considered to be of long-term value and that are collected and organized by repositories.

**Archival values:** For the purposes of this study, archival values include both *evidential value*, described as “the value for providing evidence of the origins, structure, functions, policies and operations of the person or agency that created the records” and *informational value*, which is defined as “the value for reference or research deriving from the information the records contain, as distinct from their evidential value” (Archives NZ, 2011).

**Provenance:** This term is used in two contexts; the museum context and the archives context. The museum understanding of provenance is defined as the complete history of ownership and association with a particular object or group of objects. In an archives context, provenance is defined as the agency, individual or organisation that created, received, accumulated and used the items during the course of their work or activities (National Preservation Office, 2005).
Original order: is closely associated with the archival principal of provenance. Original order is defined as the intellectual order and arrangement in which archives were created, used and/or stored by their creator (National Preservation Office, 2005).

Series: This term is used in place of record series, defined as a group of archives that are identified as a distinct group, on the basis of their shared function, subject, format or other relationship related to their creation, receipt and/or use (Australian Society of Archivists, 2008).

Documentary heritage: is a broad term defined as cultural items of significance that are moveable; that consist of sounds, images and/or codes; that are able to be preserved and that are the product of a deliberate documentary process. Documents include both the carrier or container and the information it holds (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011).

3. Research significance

This study has cross-disciplinary appeal in that it benefits both the information management and museum sectors by highlighting key differences in museum and archival collection management approaches. In doing so, the research also identifies some of the challenges that are experienced by staff in New Zealand museums who are responsible for managing archives collections.

Finally, the study suggests some areas related to the management of museum archives that could benefit from further research.
4. Review of the literature

The scope of literature dedicated to the management of museum archives in a New Zealand context is very limited and largely includes the results of quantitative surveys and bibliographic studies.

This literature review discusses issues identified in both a national and an international context. It covers existing research on community archives, the development of museum archives collections and the systems and values by which museums and archives assess, organise and describe their collections. The review also discusses the dialogue and debate around collaboration and convergence.

4.1 Research of community archives

The Community Archives Survey Report 2007 (Archives NZ, 2008) presents the findings of two surveys conducted by Archives New Zealand in 2007; the Established Archives Community Survey and the Emerging Community Survey. The surveys aimed to identify the requirements of archives repositories in New Zealand in order to develop a Community Archives Programme.

The research methodology used consisted of self-completion surveys of 149 organisations. Over half of the questions were adopted from those used in a similar survey conducted in 2007 by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA). The study’s key findings included the identification of a lack of funding, skilled staff and storage space as the major challenges faced by New Zealand archival organisations. These factors were cited by organisations as crucial to the preservation and development of their collections. These requirements were identified by both established and emerging community archives repositories.

In addition, just under half of the respondents from established archives cited digitisation of their holdings as necessary in the continuous development of the organisation and had included digitisation projects in their plans for the next three years. Future planning also included the creation of more storage space, followed by improvements in storage facilities.
Smith’s paper, *Archives in Museums* (1995) also attempts to quantify the museum archives scene. Secondly, it explores literature relevant to museum archives and finally, the paper identifies some of the issues associated with their management.

The paper opens by highlighting early opposition to the collecting of archival material in museum collections, and the efforts by archivists to keep museums, libraries and archival repositories separate. However, Smith goes on to identify that museum archival collections are now commonplace, and that archives collections are included in the collections of at least 25% of Australian museums. Smith includes in this figure both institutional records (created and kept by museums) and those that are acquired from external sources.

With regard to literature on the subject, Smith identifies that while there was some interest in museum archives during the late 1980s and early 1990s, there has been little sustained interest in North America, the United Kingdom or Australia. What literature there is tends to focus on the legislation surrounding archives, rather than their arrangement and description, or their relationship with museum objects.

Smith identifies key similarities and differences in the way archives and museum objects are documented and refers to a lack of appreciation of archival values by museum staff. Perhaps more importantly, he observes that a focus on museum methods of documentation can restrict the ability of researchers to access archival material.

Newman’s thesis (2010) identifies significant challenges facing community archives in New Zealand. These include a lack of qualified staff (with “qualified” being defined as having either formal or informal training), the day to day management of archival collections and the changing priorities of funders.

In discussing the need for skilled staff, Newman highlights the importance of treating community archives as records, rather than artefacts. In addition to this, staff must be able to arrange and describe holdings in a way that ensures that original order and provenance are maintained. More importantly however, community archivists require the appropriate skills and knowledge to carry out effective appraisal of potential acquisitions. In completing her research, Newman carried out four comparative case
studies as a research strategy. Organisations and individuals involved in the study were kept anonymous.

4.2 Archives in museum collections

In his exploration of the influence of museum practice on archival procedures, Brad Bauer (2013) describes the process with which many museums acquire archives as frequently ad hoc in nature, rather than as the result of a strategic acquisition practice. Archival material often finds its way into museum collections via the acquisition of individual items - or in small, sometimes unrelated, batches. Archives are also acquired alongside objects that are frequently the primary target of the transaction.

As a result, the existence of archival material within museum collections is commonly *incidental*, rather than purposeful and strategic. Collections of archives may be fragmentary in nature, or exist as supplementary collections, rather than a coherent collection of deliberately selected groupings (Bauer, 2013).

For her thesis titled, *Collecting for the New Zealand* (2010), Searle interviewed social history and pacific curators at Te Papa Tongarewa about their collecting practices. Searle found that while documentary heritage is acknowledged as important in providing context and meaning to three dimensional objects – and in fact, has its own inherent value - museums have historically privileged objects over archives. In response to the question of which would be collected if curators were presented with the option of an object, or a photograph of the object *in use*, one curator responded (Searle, 2010):

“We’ve always privileged the object, so the object is first…but context is really important and wherever possible we do try and collect people’s diary extracts, journal extracts or family histories … But I think, sadly sometimes, …we don’t always capture it because we’re so focused on collecting the object that the contextual information can fall a bit by the wayside, but our practice at the moment is to collect as much as possible.”

A contributing factor to these outcomes may be the independent development of museums and archival repositories with regard to their respective disciplines and
histories. Przybyla (2004) describes museum professionals and archivists working almost in isolation from each other, referring to independent bodies of literature and developing their respective methodologies and systems in order to support functions that are, at their heart, very similar. Even so, the line drawn between archival collections and museum collections can be unclear (Przybyla, 2004):

“…because of the difficulty of distinguishing between “documentary evidence,” “artifact,” and “object” – or fixing the line between archival and museum collections – institutional archives often contain commemorative plaques, buttons, pennants, ornamental seals… and any number of three-dimensional objects.”

Conversely, there is the possibility that material that can be considered archival may be claimed by collection management staff in other departments within the institution. As a result, archivists may find themselves in conflict with their museum colleagues in a bid to retain control of material.

This conflict is illustrated by Ann Abid, who shares her experience of justifying the retention of a photograph album in the archives, during an exhibition of taonga Māori at the St Louis Art Museum (Wythe, 2004):

“… several Māori people visited the museum to see the exhibition. We showed them the photographs, and they were actually able to identify some of the people and were very excited about seeing them. At this point the museum administration thought that perhaps the photographs were too important to be left in the archives and should be moved to the photograph department and be treated as art. What this would have meant, of course, was that they would be separated from their original placement in the album and treated out of context as individual objects”.

The lack of robust collections policies that support the clear identification of collecting areas within the institution – and the relationships between them - may cultivate a working environment in which staff members hold opposing views regarding the inclusion of items within one collection or another.
4.3 Assessing significance

The museum practice of collecting is of course influenced significantly by certain values that are placed on objects in their identification as good examples of material culture and heritage. The broad concept of significance is one that is applied to objects in assessing their suitability for accession into museum collections, and can be broken down into specific values that are sought after in the process of building and refining museum collections.

Russell and Winkworth (2010) define significance as the “historic, artistic, scientific and social or spiritual values that items and collections have for past, present and future generations”. Their publication, *Significance 2.0*, further identifies four comparative criteria, which can be used to assess an item’s degree of significance. These include “provenance, rarity or representativeness, condition or completeness and interpretive capacity” (Russell and Winkworth, 2010).

*Provenance* is a concept that is also referred to in reference to archival principles, although there are notable differences in the way that the term is applied in museum and archival contexts. The Australian Society of Archivists (2008) describes provenance as being concerned with the “administrative origin” of a record or group of records. In this respect, the concept is not only related to the individual, department or organisation that created and maintained the records, but also to the purpose for which they were created and kept. It is also closely related to the principle of *original order*, which attempts to preserve the original arrangement of records. By organising archives in this way, the relationships between records - and between records and their creators - are maintained (Australian Society of Archivists, 2008) (Australian Society of Archivists Committee on Descriptive Standards, 2007).

Archival theory further identifies the value of archival documents as being inherently connected to the two concepts of *evidential value* and *informational value*. Bearman (1989) describes evidential value as “the property of records to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations and other activities or events that are of importance to an organization”. The internal records preserved and managed by organisations as institutional archives highlight the ability of documents to secure the rights and responsibilities of individuals and
organisations. Bearman goes on to identify the informational value of records as a secondary concern in assessing the significance of institutional archives (Bearman, 1989).

The value of the actual contents (or information) of a document to future research is less of a factor in the appraisal of records for those repositories that are concerned with the questions of how and why a record was created. However, Bearman asserts that informational value is of particular significance for those repositories such as special collections libraries (Bearman, 1989). It can be argued that museum archives - that are generally interested in collecting archives for both their research value and their evidential value - also fall into this category.

4.4 Arrangement of collections

Ambrose and Paine (2004) make some useful observations with regard to the organisation of museum collections. They describe collections as having traditionally been divided or categorised according to academic discipline, resulting in departments and sub-collections such as ethnology, archaeology, social history, fine art and decorative arts. (It is this form of categorisation in which the historic relationships between museums and universities is most evident.) However, while acknowledging these traditional methods of classification, Ambrose and Paine also warn against the restrictions inherent in the categorisation of collections (2004):

“Collections analysed in this way may restrict opportunities for more interdisciplinary presentation and interpretation. The opportunities to use collections in a variety of ways and to view them from different standpoints can be lost through compartmentalisation. Academic study of collections… should not preclude alternative ways of using and interpreting collections.”

Sub-collections may also be delineated according to the physical object, for example, ceramics or photographs - or according to their original function, for example, weapons, transport or kitchen utensils. While the artificial grouping of objects according to material categories is useful when considering their physical requirements for long term preservation, at an intellectual level the benefit of a
typological series arrangement may limit the ways in which they can be interpreted (Ambrose and Paine, 2004).

In discussing differences between the ways in which libraries, archives and museums organise their collections, Darnell identifies the founding principles that define archival work as respect for **provenance** and **original order**, and a focus on **collective description** and **levels of control** (Darnell, 2004). She describes this focus on collective description as being markedly different to the traditional approach of museums to collection arrangement and description (Darnell, 2004):

> “Collective description is the antithesis of museum cataloging, which is to describe each object individually. Archivists describe records in hierarchical and interdependent groups... before getting to the individual item. The value of most... records lies in their being part of a larger body of material.”

**4.5 Descriptive practice**

The ways in which records are organised and described provides an indication of the values that staff place on them, whether this is historic, social, evidential or informational. Delaney (2009) explores the findings of a survey carried out in June 2008, to investigate the use and understanding of archival descriptive standards. The author identifies two broad approaches to description of archives; one based on a **bibliographic** tradition and the other on a **recordkeeping** tradition. New Zealand archival institutions have developed in both directions, although Archives New Zealand adopted the Australian Series System (from the recordkeeping tradition) in the 1980s.

The study was carried out as a self-completion survey completed by a range of respondents, 13 (or 17.6%) of whom were responsible for archives within museum or gallery collections. When asked whether archives were described differently to other collections in the organisation, the response from museums and galleries was varied. 58% did describe archives differently; 33% did not describe them differently and 8% responded that some were described differently. When asked about the type of collection management system used to describe archival holdings, 17% of
respondents (almost all of the museums) responded that they used a museum collection management system, which was either PastPerfect or Vernon.

Respondents were also asked about how archival values such as provenance were maintained, and whether a series system was implemented. As these responses were not identified by type of institution, it is not evident how museums and galleries replied to this question. In general, the study provides some interesting information regarding the description of archives in New Zealand, and has laid some good foundations for further exploration of museum-specific archives management.

Bauer also acknowledges key differences in descriptive practice between museums and archives in his 2013 paper, *Archives and artifacts: Do fences make good neighbours?* Drawing on similar observations to those identified by Darnell, he describes the cataloguing process within museums as one that generally focuses on description of a single physical object. This is in contrast to an archival approach to cataloguing that focuses on multiple items, grouped by shared provenance. This series-level or collection-level description also places emphasis on the intellectual, rather than the physical object. The problem arises when museum staff that do not have an understanding of archival principles are responsible for cataloguing archives (Bauer, 2013):

“As a result, when non-archivists have been responsible for the description of manuscript materials, fields such as scope and content, biographical and historical notes, or subject headings are omitted or constructed in a way that makes them unusable in DACS-compliant catalog records. Information about the historical context about an archival collection may have been collected elsewhere—usually in lengthy biographies created by the curators who acquired some of these collections—but it has not always been adapted for collection level catalog records.”

In acknowledging these different approaches to collection management, some writers have sought to develop taxonomies and controlled vocabularies that may be used across multiple types of repository. Chaudhry and Jiun’s paper (2005) highlights the point that the physical format of collection items has traditionally dictated the type of repository in which they are housed and preserved, whether this is a museum, library or archival repository. The writers present the findings of a case study that sought to
develop a cross-domain taxonomy that would meet the needs of heritage institutions such as museums, libraries and archives.

Waibel and Erway (2009) bring the user experience into the discussion about shared practices. They point to the fact that libraries, museums and archives all use controlled vocabularies and authority files in ensuring consistent description during cataloguing. They then emphasise that these controlled vocabularies are frequently used across domains – irrespective of the institution in which they were developed. For example, an archival repository might utilise the Library of Congress Subject Headings in developing a finding aid – or a library might employ the Getty Research Institute's Art and Architecture Thesaurus (Waibel and Erway, 2009).

Waibel and Erway argue that rather than inter-disciplinary collaboration being founded on the exchange of descriptive records, it could be based instead on the joint development of the authority records themselves. They assert that these institutions are essentially interested in describing the same basic concepts – for example, places, names, object types – and that these are able to form the basis of a set of authority records and controlled vocabularies that can be utilised in the descriptive practice of libraries, museums and archives alike.

4.6 Collaboration and convergence

The literature on collaboration between libraries, museums and archives includes opposing perspectives and opinions regarding the advantages of such approaches – and raises questions about who ultimately benefits from integration.

VanderBerg (2012) credits the pervasiveness of the internet with a change in users' attitudes towards information retrieval. The ability to locate information from a single online source, regardless of where the original document is stored, means that users have become less tolerant of the traditional boundaries between archives, libraries and museums. He believes that the push for convergence and collaboration amongst these institutions has largely come about as a result of these user attitudes.

VanderBerg identifies some major digital collaborative projects across “memory institutions” - but in doing so, stresses that the benefits of collaboration are often considered too simplistically. He especially emphasises the point that advocates of
convergence make assumptions about the distinctiveness of each institution – and in doing so, ignore their shared history. VanderBerg argues that given the relatively recent separation of libraries, museums and archives, it may be more appropriate to refer to a re-convergence (VanderBerg, 2012).

Commentators such as Trant (2009) and Fleckner (1990) advocate cross-disciplinary education programmes as an important means to achieve some form of convergence and Trant also advocates a rigorous re-thinking of the traditional institution-centric approach to sharing information with users.

Robinson (2012) stresses that policy-makers can be overly enthusiastic about merging museums, archives and libraries under the banner of “memory institutions”, without thoroughly considering the appropriateness of this title, and the unique elements of each institution’s unique relationship with the public (Robinson, 2012):

“Within converged collection environments, whether physical or digital, these basic philosophical differences between museums, libraries and archives around provision of access to collection information are yet to be convincingly resolved. The question also remains as to whether, for the sake of differentiation and variety, they should be.”

4.7 Summary of the literature

These studies highlight some interesting points with regard to the management of museum archives collections. In particular, the need for appropriate training in archives management is a common claim within the literature, especially for those responsible for community archives or small repositories.

What also appears to be evident is a lack of research being carried out in the area of museum archives management. Although manuals and guidelines have been produced that relate to the preservation of documentary heritage as well as the legal responsibilities surrounding archives and records management, there is a distinct absence of research-based literature that explores the unique challenges faced by those responsible for caring for archives in museum collections. This is certainly an area that would benefit significantly from further study.
The promotion of increased collaboration amongst museums, archives and libraries also features strongly in the literature, with advocates referring to commonalities that exist across the information management sector, as well as the public's changing expectations regarding information retrieval. The dialogue surrounding collaboration – and ultimately, convergence – also includes some persuasive arguments to consider these issues more thoughtfully. Any plans to bring these organisations closer together should be founded on a very clear understanding of their distinct as well as combined histories – and how convergence will benefit communities of researchers, visitors and users, as well as the institutions themselves.

5. Research questions

The objective of the study is to investigate if and how archival values are recognised and maintained within a museum setting. It was anticipated that the significance of archival values, and the implementation of them, would differ across museums, especially given the diversity of governance structures, institutional values, practice and missions, and staff knowledge and experience amongst the participating museums.

The primary research question for the study is: How are archival values maintained in a museum setting? This founding question identifies the purpose of the study and firmly identifies archival values not simply as principles to be understood on a purely theoretical or intellectual level – but that should influence the systems and processes by which material heritage in museums is managed.

It appears to be taken for granted that we know what museums mean when they refer to archives collections. However museums – and the archivists they employ – may hold a range of perspectives and understandings of how archives should be defined, what attributes they might have and what their relationship with other parts of the museum collection should look like. In exploring the overarching research problem, it is broken down into smaller questions: How is the distinction drawn between archives and artefacts in museums? What values do collection managers view as significant to archives collections? How are archives appraised in a museum setting?
Finally, the study seeks to examine the means with which the values associated with archives are supported in a museum setting, by asking: *What (if any) processes or procedures do they employ in order to preserve these values?* Given that museums and archives have distinct histories of their own and have developed as distinct (but related) disciplines, this question is also concerned with the challenges or limitations experienced by museum archivists in preserving archival values.

6. Research design

This study is concerned with a close investigation of the ways in which museum professionals address the unique characteristics of archives management, and any challenges they face in maintaining archival values and practices within a museum context. The research needed to gain an understanding of both museum archivists’ shared and unique perspectives in relation to their role.

In order to answer the research questions effectively, a qualitative research strategy was applied to this study. One of the strengths of qualitative approaches is their ability to produce rich, descriptive information that is placed firmly within a social context. For this reason a qualitative research approach was considered the most appropriate means of data collection and analysis for this particular study.

Qualitative interviewing was employed as the primary research method. Specifically, asynchronous semi-structured email interviews were carried out with a selection of archivists working in museums around New Zealand.

6.1 Sample

In the Directory of Archives in New Zealand, Archives New Zealand (2009) identifies institutions around the country that hold significant archives collections. Of those institutions 47 are museums.

This study sought to collect data from those museums that employed staff members who were specifically responsible for managing the archives collection in that institution, that is, archivists, archives managers and curators of archives. In doing so, the study aimed to gain insight from those museum professionals that have a
working knowledge of archival systems and principles – and whose input would reflect a cross-disciplinary awareness.

The selection of participants in this way also aimed to produce data from a variety of organisations with respect to key characteristics such as collection size, staff size, geographic location and type of collection. Given the small number of potential interviewees across the country, this approach to sampling was heavily influenced by the willingness of museum professionals to take part in the study.

A list of museums that employed archivists was created and potential participants within those institutions were identified. They were then contacted by email and asked to take part in the study. This initial request included brief information about the motivation for the research, the method that would be employed to collect information and the broad topics to be addressed during the interview. Seven respondents agreed to participate in the research.

6.2 Ethical considerations

In addressing the ethics surrounding internet assisted research Bryman (2008) highlights some considerations. The venue (or site) of any email exchanges, and its policy regarding privacy and ownership of information is hugely relevant when considering the protection of research participants in carrying out email interviews. In addressing this challenge, email interviews for the study were conducted via the researcher’s Victoria University student email account, rather than a third-party email or social media account.

Given the small size of New Zealand and the corresponding number of museums holding archives collections, it was difficult to guarantee anonymity in this study. It was determined that the identity of participants would be kept confidential during and following the completion of the research.

Ethics approval was obtained from Victoria University of Wellington’s Ethics Committee, in accordance with the University’s Human Ethics Policy (2013).
Participants were sent a Participant Information Sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the method of data collection and information about confidentiality and the disposal of data provided by them. Before conducting the interviews, signed, informed, written consent was acquired from all research participants.

Participants were advised that they could pull out of the research at any time and for any reason, without explanation, before the completion of data analysis. They were also advised that any information provided by them would not be accessed by anyone other than the researcher and research supervisor.

There was no deception involved in the research. As much information as practical was given to participants prior to conducting the interviews, and every effort was made to answer any queries or concerns they had with regard to their involvement in the study.

Participants were offered a summary of the research findings upon its completion.

6.3 Data collection

Given the nature of the research questions, one of the primary considerations in selecting a suitable research method was allowing participants sufficient time to consider their responses. The interview questions asked for information that may not have been available to hand and it was therefore important that participants were provided the time to reflect on their answers thoroughly.

Of equal concern was the fact that the participants were geographically dispersed and it was not viable to travel to each location to interview participants in person.

Because of these factors, asynchronous semi-structured email interviews were determined to be the most useful tool for participants to contribute information.

Communication by email ensured that any follow up questions and comments could be posed and responded to without the delay associated with phone meetings. An added advantage of email interviews was the elimination of the task of transcribing audio recorded material.
In discussing email interviewing, Bryman (2008) identifies some challenges inherent in this method of data collection. In particular he notes difficulty in building rapport, the increased commitment and motivation required by participants and the potentially protracted nature of (especially asynchronous) email interviews as important considerations.

Email interviews were carried out over the course of three weeks in May 2013. Participants were generally very forthcoming with information, and several provided institutional and personal documentation to support their responses. None of the participants decided to withdraw from the study once they had committed to it.

**6.4 Limitations**

The most significant limitation of the study was the availability of potential participants to be engaged in the study. This is partly due to the small size of the sample population, with few museums in New Zealand employing archivists. A second factor influencing participation levels was the workload of potential interviewees.

**6.5 Delimitations**

The study sample was restricted to staff working in those museums listed in the Directory of Archives in New Zealand (Archives NZ, 2009). Of those museums, only those that employed archivists were approached. Any archivists that may work in museums that were not listed in the Directory were not included in the sample.

It was considered that some museum archivists may have different understandings of archival terms, particularly with regard to *provenance* and *original order*. In order to mitigate this problem, the interview question regarding archival values included a brief explanation of what was meant by the terms.

The findings of the study are generalisable to museums in New Zealand that employ archivists.
6.6 Thematic analysis

A thematic approach to data analysis was applied in the examination of the research data. This approach was selected as the most effective in analysing the data as it allows key areas of interest to be drawn out from the data, without an emphasis or reliance on preconceived ideas or assumptions about the findings.

In searching for themes, the analysis process focused on the identification of patterns across the data set, including recurring topics, ideas and statements. Conversely, it identified idiosyncrasies between interviews, which served to highlight the experience of the individual archivist – and acknowledged any relevant issues that were not addressed by interviewees. Finally, the analysis sought to make connections between interview material and key concepts or issues described in the literature.

Thematic analysis has several unique advantages over other approaches to qualitative data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) acknowledge that a thematic analysis approach has often gone unrecognised as an analytic method in its own right - but that has historically been used to supplement other approaches. They describe qualitative analytic methods as being divided into two broad categories, one including those methods that are centred around, or strongly connected to, a theoretical standpoint. The other group of analytic methods – of which theoretical analysis is one – is largely independent of theory and as they describe, can “be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility is one of the main strengths of a theoretical analysis method.

Once data had been collected, the name of each participant was replaced with a code in order to protect their confidentiality, for example, P1, P2, P3, and so on. The process of analysis began with the responses from each interview being read and analysed independently as a data item. This process was considered useful in gaining some familiarisation with the data and developing an understanding of each participant's view of their experience of managing archives. This stage of analysis involved initial coding or noting of repetitions and identifiable themes within individual interviews.
The second stage of analysis involved the exploration of similarities across, and differences between, interview responses. The responses of each interview were divided and arranged according to each set of questions. The seven responses to each set of questions were then compiled, analysed and interpreted as a group. This part of the analytical process was most effective in drawing out prominent or recurring themes. For example, common challenges experienced by archivists were identified, as were any similarities in perception regarding the efficacy of collection management systems. In addition to these commonalities, the thematic analysis highlighted differences of opinion or experiences across interviewees.

These two processes did not occur entirely independently. During the interpretation of responses to each research question, individual interviews were frequently referred back to, in order to place comments of interest within their original context.

7. Discussion of findings

The research literature on the management of museum archives in New Zealand is limited. As such, this study serves to provide a broad introduction to an under-researched area. The approach to the discussion of findings focuses on brief discussion of a range of key themes that were identified across the entire data set, rather than an in depth exploration of a small selection of the more prominent themes.

7.1 Museum archivists

There was a surprising degree of commonality with regard to the pathways that led participants into the museum archivist role. The majority of participants had gained significant skills and knowledge about managing archives through on job training, rather than formal qualifications, although a couple had supplemented this with certificates in archives management and preservation. With regard to prior experience and training, there was stronger evidence of museum experience and museum related degrees. One archivist had started employment at the museum as a guide before moving into an archives assistant role and eventually taking on the position of Archivist. Two of the archivists had library backgrounds.
This combination of experiences illustrates a strong connection between libraries, archives and museums – and demonstrates an understanding amongst employers that the skills and knowledge necessary for archives related work are transferable from other institutions in the sector.

The primary roles undertaken by participants were archives acquisition, arrangement and description and administration of research services. Several of the participants also cited exhibition related tasks and retrospective cataloguing of archives as a significant part of the role. The issue of cataloguing backlogs can be considered a common challenge shared by collections staff across museum departments. Interestingly, not all of the archivists were greatly involved in the appraisal process.

### 7.2 Museum archives collections

Archives collections discussed in the study consisted of collected archives, with the primary focus being on geographic location. In describing their collections, all but one archivist referred to location as being a major focus and determinant of what is collected. Two archivists described their collections as including (and in one case, as being founded on) non-current local government records. A third collection was described as including institutional archives also. The focus on location is to be expected; certainly in the Directory of Archives in New Zealand (Archives NZ, 2009) the presence of museums whose collections are not based on a specific geographical location is the exception, rather than the norm.

The archivists interviewed displayed a rich, in depth knowledge about their respective collections and were very forthcoming about the strengths and weaknesses of their collecting areas. Archives collections generally included a combination of community archives, photographs, audio visual material, maps and plans and organisational records.

The distinction between the archives collections and other collecting areas in the museums was generally defined in two ways. Firstly, some comments were made on differences in *physical format* – that is, archives were variously described as being made up of paper-based or audio visual material. Secondly, comparisons were made with regard to *use* - that is, archives consisted of reference or research material: “The
archive collection differs from the... other collections... in that it is primarily comprised of research based documents” (P5).

In addition, as in the case of three responses, items in the archives collection were described as supporting other collecting areas of the museum.

One participant also highlighted differences with regard to working relationships amongst museum staff – particularly the autonomy of the archivist role, “...my day to day work is relatively independent from that of my colleagues, who are involved with the museum side of things” (P3).

7.3 Assessing value

One of the core questions of the study relates to the values that archivists seek in appraising potential archives accessions. The majority of participants referred to geographic location as the primary consideration when deciding if items were suitable for the collection. Their comments were illustrated with reference to collections policies that were focused on preserving local history and heritage and on the commitment of museums to their respective towns, cities and/or districts: “It really takes knowing the collection, the local community and the history of the area to know what to accept and what not” (P3).

In describing the assessment process for potential additions to the collection, one archivist referred to the criteria outlined in Russell and Winkworth's publication, Significance 2.0; again, these criteria are identified as historic significance, aesthetic significance, scientific, research or technical significance and social or spiritual significance (Russell and Winkworth, 2010).

The Significance criteria were developed for the former Heritage Collections Council of Australia to assist museum collection management staff in assessing the value of objects. Specifically, it provides a basis for appraisal that can fit into museum collections policies. In contrast, guides for the appraisal of archives frequently reference additional criteria such as informational value and evidential value (National Preservation Office, 2005). Although these archival values were not directly identified in responses to the question regarding assessment of value, they were indirectly referenced in the archivists' description of archives as research collections.
Other comments regarding the selection of material included one observation regarding the subjectivity inherent in the appraisal process. Also of note were several references to a curator-led process:

“"The curatorial staff... determine the significance of archives as they relate to the overall collections" (P1).

“Our curators add to the collection, including the archives, based on our collecting policy. The Archivist... only comment[s] on matters such as our ability to store the item, its condition, whether there is any duplication... and any copyright... issues” (P6).

The reference to archives collections as existing in support of other collecting areas can be directly linked to further comments by archivists that highlight a perception of archives as having a secondary status within museums.

7.4 The use of archives in museums

During the interviews archivists discussed two ways in which archives in their collections were used, that is, for research or reference and as part of exhibitions (both physical and online). These two usages clearly reflect the value that museum professionals – including those responsible for managing archives, as well as their colleagues in other departments – place on archives.

The reference to archives as a research tool appeared most frequently, and was certainly the way in which archives collections were distinguished from other collections by some of the participants. However, while research value was considered one of the primary characteristics of archival material, the fact that other values – particularly interpretive value - tended to go unrecognised was a source of frustration for some archivists:

“Another difficulty is the presumed limited display potential archives tend to have. Objects and images are easier to interpret for museum exhibitions so tend to be displayed more; whereas the display potential of archives [is] often overlooked” (P5).
“Archives are either approached as museum objects to be preserved and handled infrequently or reference material to be used, photocopied, etc” (P6).

These statements capture the tension between contrasting perceptions or assumptions regarding the value – and therefore use – of archival material in museums.

### 7.5 Inherited systems

In describing her work with museum archives, Michelle Ganz, Archivist at the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum, highlighted the discrepancies amongst multiple numbering systems as a major issue (Zamon, 2012). The task of gaining a sense of the previous numbering and cataloguing practices carried out by former staff is described as one of the most frustrating, yet rewarding, aspects of the role:

“Museum archives present their own problems and rewards. Creating an orderly usable collection out of chaos 115 years in the making has been a challenging task – one that has taught me to think beyond the standard way of doing things. It has shown me that every problem has a solution if you look hard enough, and every success is worth the effort” (Zamon, 2012).

The need to take stock of the systems that had been implemented by previous archivists or collection managers – and to develop and improve those systems – was commented on by some archivists. One identified the need for retrospective appraisal and cataloguing of archives, in order to bring the collection into line with current policy and procedures. Similarly, another described retrospective arrangement and description as an important part of the role and commented on the detrimental effects of previous arrangement systems on the information held about the collection:

“The collection is currently arranged in a variety of ways. The early system was as a research collection with any new donation being split into subjects... This still operates well although original order and donors [have] been lost” (P2).
The challenges of reconciling historic collection management practices that are frequently inadequate, if not damaging – and the protection of the intellectual integrity of the collection – are ones that archivists appeared to be committed to addressing in their everyday work.

### 7.6 Arranging and describing museum archives

Some form of series system was implemented within most of the collections that the archivists managed, with several archivists maintaining comprehensive finding aids that allowed searches from collection level right down to item level or smaller.

The reference to levels of description that was made by Darnell (2004) and Searle (2010) was also highlighted in the interviews, particularly with regard to the focus of museum registrars and curators on the *object*, rather than the *collection*. This point was raised as archivists identified some of the challenges in maintaining archival values during the description process:

“[The challenge is] the balance to be struck between cataloguing and numbering archival items as museum objects and [describing] and [numbering] in a relational way as archival items” (P4).

“The registrar does not understand the archives are different from museum items and tries to impose museum standards of cataloguing...” (P2).

This bias towards item level description and description of the physical object when dealing with museum archives illustrates one of the core differences between the two disciplines.

### 7.7 Collection management systems

Collection management systems have a hugely significant effect on the ability of archivists to effectively manage their collections. Capturing all levels of information about archival material - the relationships between items, access and reproduction rights, reference services, information regarding provenance as well as location and preservation of the physical object – is crucial to archives management.
Amongst the seven archivists interviewed, four different collection management systems were in use. The majority of archivists were utilising collection management systems designed for museum collections (Vernon CMS, Ke EMu and PastPerfect) and one was using a library management system (DB Textworks). None of the archivists reported using collection management systems designed specifically for archives management.

At best, participants had mixed views of the collection management systems that they used. In several cases, archivists identified their collection management systems as one of the biggest challenges in managing archives in a museum setting.

The overall impression was that archivists were “making do” with the systems they had acquired. Some had adapted the way information about archives was recorded, in order to fit into the available fields and others had adapted the actual collection management systems, in order to improve their functionality for archives management:

“...how archives are described into it has been adapted to suit the system” (P5).

“...the database fields have been 'massaged' to cope with archival descriptions” (P1).

“...it has needed to be extensively customised over the years to cope with unpublished items” (P4).

“...it is not well suited for archival collections where items are related and require series lists and similar organisation” (P6).

This frustration with systems that are designed to aid collection management processes clearly highlighted a need to further explore the software options being made available to museum archivists.

With regard to the publication of collections catalogues online, one archivist identified this as an important solution to the most significant challenge in managing archives in a museum setting – that of access.
Given the research value of archives collections, the inability of archivists to provide adequate levels of service to researchers can be a significant issue. The commitment to address this problem through the digitisation of archives and the publication of reproductions online – echoes some of the findings of the Community Archives Survey Report 2007 (Archives NZ, 2008) in its identification of collection digitisation as a major priority for archives repositories.

7.8 Relationships between museums and archives

There was a common perception amongst archivists that the collections they managed were of secondary importance, compared to other museum collections. Comments regarding institutional attitudes towards archives collections illustrated the frustration experienced by archivists:

“For a collection which is one of the most frequently used and publicly accessible of all the collections in the Museum, [archives staff have] often had to fight for adequate resourcing in terms of collection care and management” (P4).

“The Archives tend to be seen as a poor relation to the museum” (P2).

Strong parallels can be drawn between these views and Smith’s observations regarding a lack of understanding and appreciation of archival values amongst general museum staff (Smith, 1995) and the experience of St Louis Art Museum archivist, Ann Abid (Wythe, 2004). The comments made by participants regarding the lack of recognition of their collections related to a range of contexts, including assumptions regarding acquisitions, the purpose of archives collections, and inadequate resourcing.

In acknowledging these tensions, archivists also highlighted the common interest that museums and archives have in preserving heritage information and making it accessible to the public. Most of the archivists also acknowledged the concepts (such as provenance and preservation) that were shared by museums and archives – and the impression from the interview data was that these commonalities could provide the basis for closer relationships between museum and archives collections and the staff managing them:
“... it is well worth investigating how to make this link stronger and how to encourage both types of collections to be appropriately preserved and made accessible to the public and researchers” (P3).

“The challenge we face is for our... Council to recognise the importance of continuing to preserve the history of [the district] and people and maintain this museum and archive facility as one unit” (P7).

This sentiment also features prominently in the literature on collaboration. In her session at the 2004 Choices and Challenges Conference, Jan Paris identified preservation as a key concept that was shared by archives and museums. However, museums tended to be focused on preserving the *materiality* of the object, whereas archivists were concerned with the preservation of *content* and *context* (Yakel, 2005). Paris concluded that the most important consideration in the appraisal and management of heritage items is that the *meaning* of the object is preserved. This shift in focus towards the preservation of meaning is one that would benefit from the unique perspectives of museums and archives.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how archival values are maintained in the management of archives in museum collections. What is clear from the research is that there appears to be a fluidity between the concept of documentary heritage, including archives, and that of the museum artefact or object. While the study did not set out to explore this notion, it is certainly relevant – particularly as it relates to mixed acquisitions.

The Community Archives Survey Report 2007 (Archives NZ, 2008) identified a lack of funding and storage space as two of the key challenges faced by New Zealand archival organisations. These issues are certainly of ongoing concern among museum archivists - however, this study identified other challenges that appear to have a stronger influence on the working life of archivists in New Zealand museums.

One of the primary observations of this study is that museum archivists in New Zealand often feel that they – and the collections they manage – are not given equal
standing as their colleagues in other departments. This is evident in the comments concerning appropriate resourcing – particularly given the public use of archives – and those concerning a lack of knowledge regarding the different systems and processes required for archives collections.

This concern is referenced in much of the literature, especially in discussions around the “invisibility” of archivists and the lack of awareness of archival values within museums. Attention is also drawn to the conflicting pressures to maintain disciplinary authority over discreet collecting areas within the museum and the need for colleagues to work collaboratively. An interesting area for future research is the exploration of privilege and bias inherent in professional relationships within museums. Certainly, as museum roles change – both in relation to their interactions with the public, and resulting staff requirements – there is plenty of room for assumptions about traditional museum structures to be reassessed.

Another key finding of the study is that the collections management systems that are used to manage archives in New Zealand museums are largely considered inappropriate for the collections. Although this study did not investigate this issue deeply, there is further scope for a closer exploration of the problems encountered by museum archivists in using collections software - and the identification of alternative options available to museum archivists with regard to collection management systems.

Finally, this study highlighted a need for archival perspectives and principles to be more fully recognised in museum settings. As museums adjust and readjust themselves to a rapidly changing world, several changes have become evident in their approaches to objects and their acquisition and organisation. The movement of museum practice away from an object-centric approach to collecting, towards a context-centric one in which contextual information about an object, institution or place is highly valued - is an approach that archivists are very familiar with. In addition, the set of skills brought by archivists into museums – such as expertise in managing born digital collections – can increase the capacity of museums to meet the changing needs of their communities and their governing bodies.
Those museums managed by local government authorities may especially find themselves focusing their attention towards cooperation with other heritage institutions and information repositories, as councils become increasingly concerned with shared services.

Already, the development of collaborative approaches to education in the heritage and information sectors, such as the iSchools and Web-based Information Science Education (WISE) consortiums, provide exciting opportunities for museum and information professionals to explore the possibilities of their professional relationships.
References


Appendix I

Participant Information Sheet for a Study of Archives Management in New Zealand Museums

Researcher: Catherine Jehly, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington

I am a Masters student in Information Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of this degree I am undertaking a research project that will explore the management of archives in museum collections. I am especially interested in how archival principles are acknowledged in a museum setting.

A third of archives collections in New Zealand are held in museums, so this research is important in gaining an understanding of the issues and/or challenges faced by museum staff in the management of these collections. I am inviting you to take part in this project.

The research will be carried out by email interview, which will provide sufficient time to consider answers carefully. There will also be the opportunity for follow-up questions or comments if required. I will ask a series of questions focused on the appraisal and organisation of archives in the museum which should take approximately 10-15 minutes to answer.

Should you feel the need to withdraw from the project, you may do so without question at any time before 31 May and any information you have contributed will be destroyed. All information collected by participants will be aggregated in the research report. Any information provided by you will be kept confidential and your responses will not be accessed by anybody other than myself and my supervisor, Shannon Wellington.

The research project will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters degree in Information Studies. The collected data may also be used in conference reports and publications. Email responses will be destroyed 1 year after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please email me at [jehlycath@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:jehlycath@myvuw.ac.nz) or phone [021 363 2662]. Alternatively, you may email my supervisor, Shannon Wellington, at [shannon.wellington@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:shannon.wellington@vuw.ac.nz) or phone [04 463 6862].

Kind regards
Catherine Jehly
Appendix II

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Please describe your background and current role at the Museum. What are the responsibilities of your role? Do you have any roles in the Museum other than archives management? What training or experience do you have in managing archives?

2. What does the Museum archives collection include? How is it distinct from other collections in the Museum?

3. When appraising archives, how do you determine their significance? What values do you look for? Are there organisational policies or guidelines to assist you in this decision-making?

4. How is the archives collection organised? Is it separated into smaller collections, and if so, what are these based on?

5. Respect for provenance (the organisation or individual that created or maintained the archives) and original order (the way in which the archives were originally organised) are important archival principles. How are these principles maintained in the Museum’s cataloguing and retrieval systems? How well does the collection management software support these principles?

6. What do you see as the major challenges in managing archives in a museum setting?

7. Feel free to make any other comments.