

Australia's lost and missing documentary heritage

Ross Harvey and Anne Lloyd

The destruction of the library at Mount Stromlo in the Canberra bushfires on 18 January 2003 has brought to our attention — once again — the vulnerability of significant parts of our cultural heritage. Even more recently, the television coverage of the looting of libraries, archives and museums in Iraq has reinforced this vulnerability and has forcibly brought to our attention the need to support efforts to preserve important documentary heritage. (Documentary heritage is defined as items that are moveable, made up of signs/codes, sounds and/or images, preservable, reproducible and migratable, and the product of a deliberate documenting process. It includes all of the kinds of material found in libraries and archives, including information in digital form.)

The Australian Memory of the World Program aims to heighten awareness of these issues by establishing and maintaining the Australian *Memory of the World Register* (see <http://www.amw.org.au>). This register will also include a section about lost and missing heritage.

In Australia, as in every other country, significant parts of our documentary heritage have been lost or are missing. It is important to record what documentary heritage is known to be lost and what is missing because, in the words of Alan Howell:

...developing a public record of this now inaccessible heritage is a crucial means of placing the Memory of the World Program in context, and is a precursor to the possibility of virtual reconstruction of lost and dispersed memory. It adds both urgency and perspective to the challenges of identifying and protecting the surviving heritage. (http://members.ozemail.com.au/~aghowell/mow/amow_wrd.doc)

Lost heritage is material that is known to no longer survive — its decay or destruction is reliably documented or can be reliably assumed. Missing heritage is material whose current whereabouts is unknown, but whose loss cannot be confirmed or reliably assumed. This material would have been eligible for inclusion in the register if it had survived or was accessible. There are some difficulties in recording material that is not available to be examined. For instance, precise description is unlikely to be possible, so only a general description may be the best we can do.

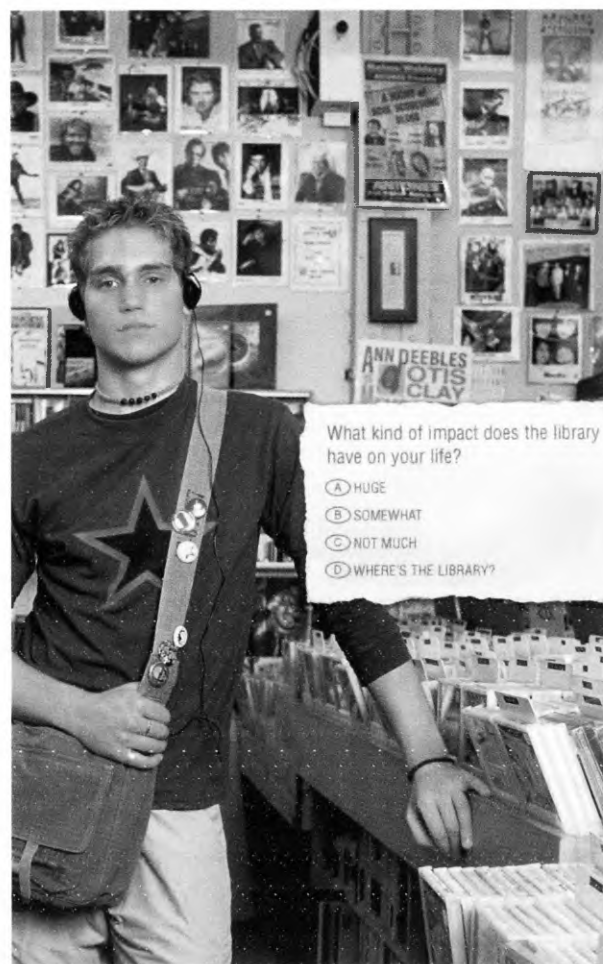
Ross Harvey and Anne Lloyd have agreed to compile a list of Australia's lost and missing documentary heritage for the Australian *Memory of the World* project. Anne and Ross are based in the School of Information Studies at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. We are conducting a preliminary informal survey to identify some starting points. We are very interested in receiving your responses to these questions:

- 1 Can you tell us about any collections or items that you think fit into the definition of lost or missing documentary heritage of national significance?
- 2 Can you suggest anyone else we should contact?

Definitions of *Documentary heritage* and *Significance* can be found at: http://members.ozemail.com.au/~aghowell/mow/amow_cri.htm — see Section 12, which deals with Lost and Missing heritage.

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The May issue of the *Australian Library Journal* carries an article describing in more detail the Australian Memory of the World Program. The article title is 'UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme and Australia's lost and missing documentary heritage', by Ross Harvey.



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