

Benchmarking the balance of access, security and preservation for significant library collections

Philippa Stevens

Where have I come from?





Brief History

- I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land that the State Library of New South Wales is built on and pay my respects to the Elders both past and present in Australia.
- The State Library of NSW is the oldest library in Australia.
- The Australian Subscription Library was established in 1826 in Sydney (less than 30 years after colonisation).
- In 1869 the NSW Government purchased it to form the Sydney Free Public Library, the first truly public library for the people of NSW.
- The Mitchell Library, the first library in the country to concentrate entirely on Australian content, opened in 1910 and is named after its major benefactor David Scott Mitchell.
- The Dixson Wing was added after Sir William Dixson, another great collector of Australian material donated his collection and funds also to the Library.
- So for Australians, this Library is very significant.

Mitchell Library Reading Room



Spot the difference – we moved the staff desk in one of the many renovations

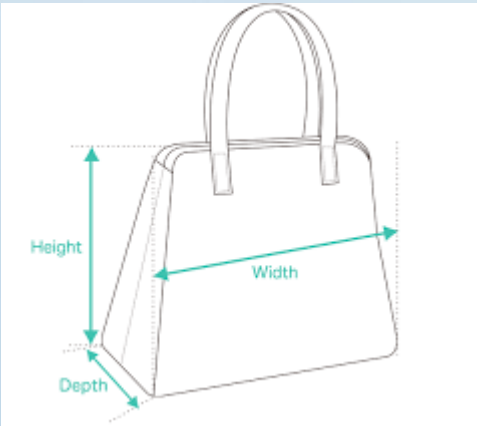


My Story . . . . . .



- Began as a casual General Library Assistant at the University of Sydney Library as a first year student in 1989.
- Finished in 2011 at the University with a position of managing Fisher Library the largest and busiest Library in the network.
- Moved to the State Library of NSW at the beginning of 2012 as the new Manager of Access & Information.
- Within 3 months of starting the government had changed, large budget cuts were made and through two rounds of redundancies and completed a process of reducing staff from about 96 FTE to 66 FTE without cutting back hours or services

My story con't . . .



- When I was not dealing with those few small challenges I had become aware that there some issues with collection security throughout the whole "life cycle" of providing access to researchers.
- Also one of the restructuring processes moved more of the responsibility for accessing special collections into my role.
- Started small, what could we do with no money?
  - Defined bags and their size
  - Improved information to clients about requirements for accessing special collections
  - Approvals for access to high value material were centralised for clarity and consistency
  - Redefined staff processes and try to reduce number of staff going to the Stacks

Some other changes

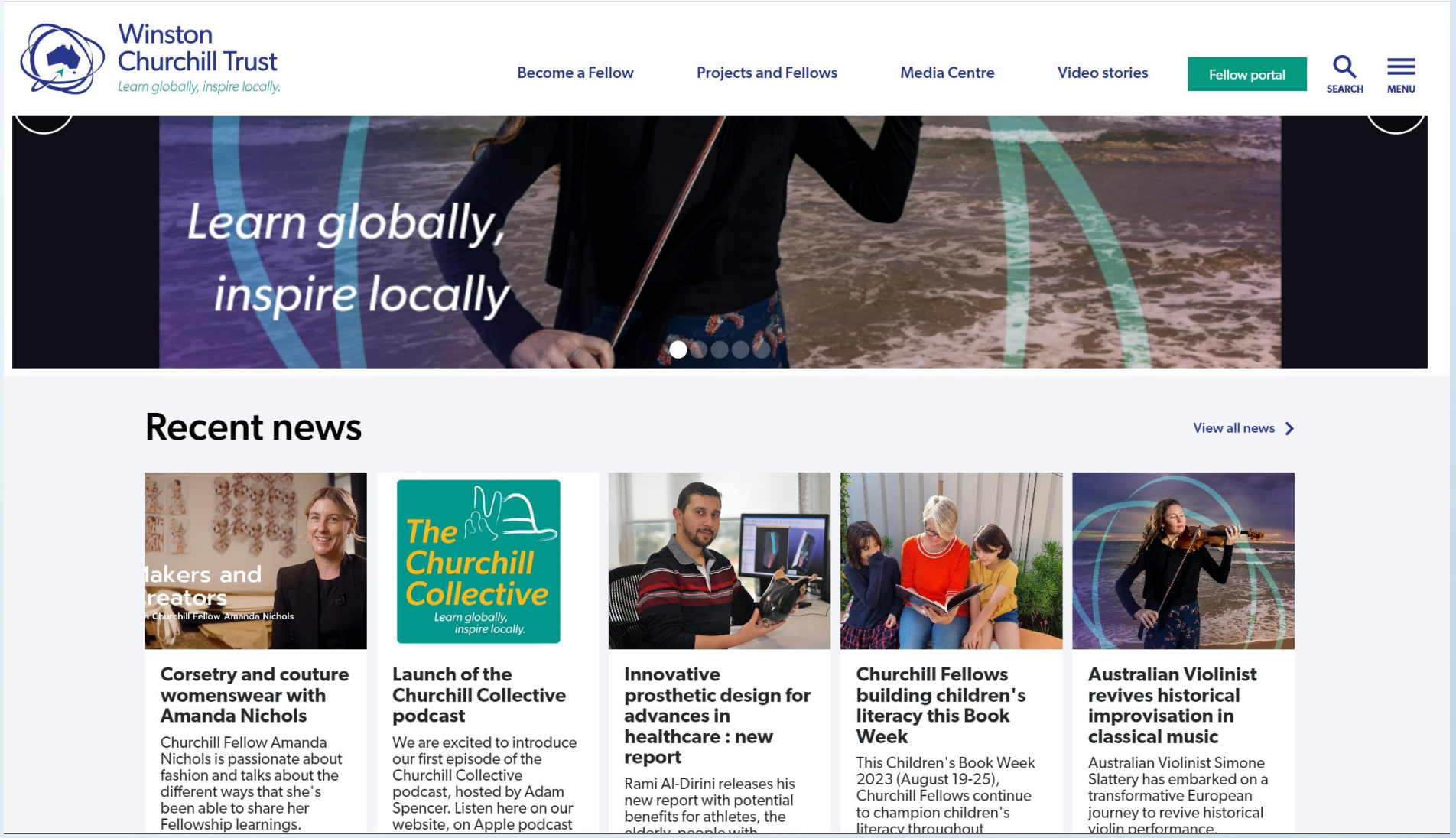
- With a little bit of money we purchased lockable trolleys to move high value collection about the Library
- With some more money we purchased a high security safe with a higher level of security and tracking of access and fireproof for 24 hours to use for high value material in use
- Added a higher security flat map / plan cabinet for large flat items
- With a lot more money and a special project compactus storage was installed on successive floors of the storage area allowing the return to onsite storage of some of the collections eg the bulk of the manuscripts

But what else could be done?



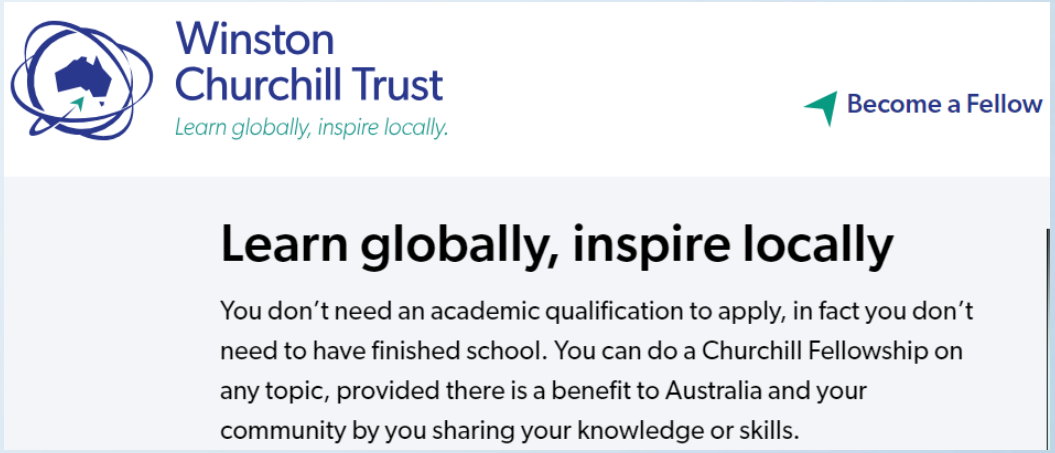
- Literature tends to be fairly unexplicit and says thing like "Minimise the number of staff"
- We needed practical ideas and better strategies to take us to the next step

What is the Churchill Trust?



My Churchill Fellowship

- Went to Churchill Fellowship Information evening in 2017 and then in 2018 and then again in 2019
- Applied successfully in 2019 and was aiming to come to this Summer School in 2020 – we all know what happened and the option for virtual Fellowship very unappealing especially as I am doubtful that it could be successfully done



Project almost cancelled several times does live again in 2023

- Australia took being an island to the next level and closed its borders for two years. Just as travel took off again I become very unwell and eventually had to leave my position at the Library . . . . .
- Title of project "To benchmark the balance of access, security and preservation for significant library collections"



Prior to trip – Australian networking



- National and State Libraries Australasia Visitor Experience Group
- University of Sydney Rare Books Librarian – Julie Sommerfeldt
- Convenor of the ALIA (Australian Library and Information Association) Rare Books Group
- National Archives of Australia
- Will contact the Public Libraries team who work with New South Wales Public Libraries when I return

Project Data



Questions loosely grouped into categories

- Readers
- High value and unique collection items
- Storage
- Staff
- Security Incidents
- Policies
- Future Planning

Q's - Readers

- Reader identification and cards, photo on cards
- Conditions of Use example
- Items permitted in reading room
- Layout of reading room
- Lockers
- Any clothing limitations
- Education about handling
- Is there an induction of new readers process?
- How do readers leave the reading room, is there a check?
- Do you allow papers and notes to be taken in?
- Weighing machine? Discrepancies? What do you do?
- Any other deterrents?
- Age, 18 +? Other requirements for access eg letters?
- Use of cameras etc by readers

Q's - High value and unique collection material

- Philosophy of marking of collection? This can incl hidden marking and security tagging
- Any special procedures in addition to the usual in the reading rooms
- Where do supervised viewings take place?
- Any particular accessories or tools that you use?
- What about small items eg stamps and coins? Anything special?
- Cameras and occasions for use
- Criteria of value for high value?
- Digitised or photographed for identification before allowed to view / access?
- Compliance checks of high value storage areas with all items with stack slips are accounted
- Any limit on how many times "popular " items can be retrieved for the safe each year or other tracking methods?
- How easy should it be to request such items? What constitutes a valid request especially if something has been digitised? Are there criteria or decision making process?
- What about requests from VIPs?

Q's Storage

- When is item retrieved for a viewing and how is it stored?
- Stocktakes?
- Safes and other equipment? Eg Mobile cameras?
- Is a marker placed where the collection should be when item in use?
- Method of access? Swipe? Any keys?
- Access to high value areas eg what percentage of staff have access to the high value collection areas?
- Light exposure on items not being used ie are items stored individually so lights in room for retrieval only disturb the item being collected?
- Any suggested arrangement of shelves / cupboards etc etc

Q's Staff

- Use of high value collection material for work purposes and any special procedures?
- What training do staff receive for supervising high value collection activities?
- How do you balance these activities in terms of rostering staff and having staff available both for retrieval and for supervision?
- Is material loaned using the usual system?
- Ways to manage changes in this area?
- Are collection security measures part of the induction of new staff?
- Is there a staff member who has particular responsibility for managing collection security?
- Handling refresher training provided and how often
- Police checks on staff prior to employment and subsequent
- Monitoring staff access to high value storage areas. How is it done? Is any analysis done?

Q's Policies

- Title and function and if possible a copy of relevant policies.
- How often do you review these?
- Is the sense of the policies getting more strict or more relaxed

Q's Security Incidents

- By readers?
- By staff?
- Any suspected incidents that you were unable to follow up?
- Do you have a protocol in place? How long is something missing then been considered stolen?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Have incidents acted as a catalyst for change?

Q's Future Planning

- Are you planning any changes to collection security?
- What was the most recent change you have made?
- What would be the next change you would like to make in regard to collection security if you had unlimited funds?
- Are there any other obstacles preventing you making particular changes? Eg reader reaction

Security of project data

- Handwriting notes on visit and then typing up in cloud document anonymised. Each site has a number and the key is held elsewhere
- Created separate doc of photos (mainly of public areas and rules signs)with locations identified (to help me remember!)
- Will be destroying original notes post trip
- Report will be written using Site numbers and all Visit hosts will be sent a copy prior to deadline for their review but also possible request to make a “best practice” feature named

Where am I going?

- UK – National Archives, British Library, Weston Library at Oxford, Cambridge University Library and Churchill Archives Centre
- France – Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Archives Nationale de France and Bibliotheque de Saint-Genevieve (Sorbonne)
- Spain – Biblioteca Nacional de Espana
- Denmark – Det Kongelige Bibliotek
- Netherlands - Koninklijke Bibliotheek
- Belgium - Bibliothèque royale de Belgique / Koninklijke bibliotheek van België



. . . . . almost 9 weeks of travel

- Munich – Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
- Rome - Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma
- US – New York State Archives, New York Public Library, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Boston Public Library, National Archives and Records Administration Washington, Seattle Public Library, Berkeley and last but not least San Francisco Public Library

- An amazing list of libraries and a such a wonderful testament to the information sharing and willingness to collaborate within our profession in a true global sense.



Ooohh the topic is timely after all

Museum worker fired as treasures vanish

BRITAIN

Kylie MacLellan

LONDON: The British Museum said a member of staff had been dismissed after treasures from its collection, including gold jewellery and gems, had been found to be missing, stolen or damaged.

The museum, one of the most visited in the world, said it was taking legal action against the individual and had also launched a review of security. London's Metropolitan Police is also investigating, the museum said.

It said most of the items involved were small pieces kept in a storeroom and included gold jewellery, gems and semi-precious stones and glass dating from the 15th century BC to the 19th century AD.

None of the items had recently been on public display and were kept primarily for academic and research purposes, it added.

The 264-year-old museum said it has also ordered an independent review of security and a "vigorous program to recover the missing items".

"This is a highly unusual incident," said the museum's director Hartwig Fischer. "We have already tightened our security arrangements and we are working alongside outside experts to complete a definitive account of what is missing, damaged and stolen. This will allow us to throw our efforts into the recovery of objects."

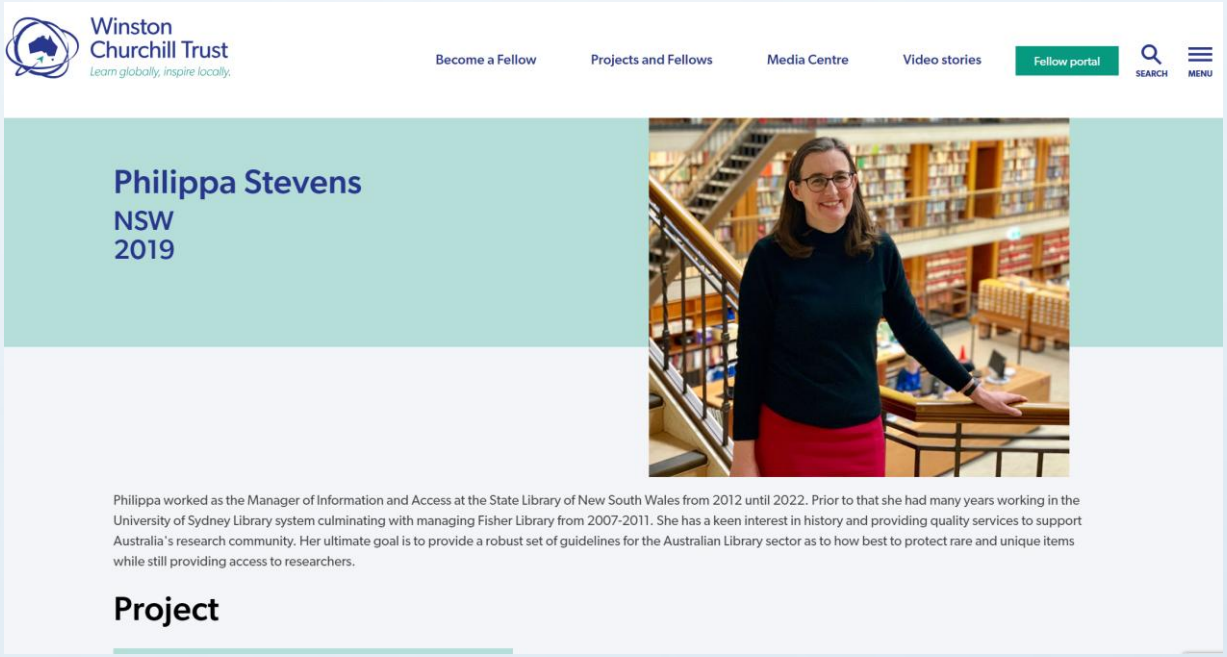
The museum's chair, former finance minister George Osborne, said the trustees were extremely concerned when they had learnt of the theft "earlier this year".

The institution draws visitors from around the world who come to see a vast collection of artefacts ranging from the Rosetta Stone that unlocked the language of ancient Egypt to scrolls bearing 12th century Chinese poetry and masks created by the indigenous peoples.

But the museum has also attracted controversy because it has resisted calls from communities around the world to return items of historical significance that were acquired during the era of the British Empire. The most famous of these disputes include marble carvings from the Parthenon in Greece and the Benin bronzes from West Africa.

Reuters, AP

8 weeks after I get back . . . .



- Formal report for the Churchill Trust is required.
- Plan to is send all libraries I visited a draft copy at the 7 week mark to invite any comments or requests for correction.
- The timing is slightly awkward due to December being generally a very busy month but can't be helped

A few early observations



- One location has a wonderful slideshow for new researchers to that site to watch about handling, the clearest I have ever seen and images can say a thousand words sometimes.
- I saw one collection where all special collections are boxed – looked beautiful on the shelf but is probably unachievable for most of us
- Another location had a system of full checks of entry and exit processes at the front door and some of the toughest limitations on what you can take into the RR but the manner of the guards was excellent

. . . .and a few others



- Stamps can rescue an item even after it went missing in 1956, it then turned up for auction in 2023 and was recovered
- Using the library management system to connect to exit gates and only readers with no loans can activate gates to open
- A general sense that reader access to collection has been made easier but there are more checks and controls on staff now than there used to be and much more awareness that staff are “our greatest asset and biggest risk” and the risk is not negligible but actually quite tangible

Plan for 2024

- Develop industry supported (fingers crossed!) guidelines for Australian libraries with special collections (am in contact with various Australian organisations to try and help me achieve this)
- Written in the form of building blocks so once you have achieved a certain level you start looking to incorporate the next level up as your forward strategy
- Develop a collection security strategic forward plan for the State Library of NSW with current staff
- Continue working in my part time bakery job which gives me enough time to do the above



Any questions?

