

Introducing Rhonda Campbell

project officer

copying and digitisation

What different positions have you held in your time at State Records?

For the past 10 years I have mainly worked in the Archives Control Program, arranging and describing records, and in Public Access, helping with research enquiries and conducting talks and tours. In 1999 I had a supervisory role in the movement of five kilometres of paper records from the Sydney Records Centre in The Rocks to the Western Sydney Records Centre at Kingswood, which proved to be one of the most challenging jobs I have undertaken in my time at State Records.

What skills have you learnt being involved in the digitisation project?

When people look at a digital image on a computer screen, I don't think they realise all the work that has gone on behind the scenes to produce that image. I know that was the case for me before I became involved in State Records' digitisation project. When I accepted the position of Project Officer, Copying & Digitisation I knew I would be embarking on a very steep learning curve for the first six months.

I have been involved in a very hands-on way for our pilot digitisation project, the *Registry of Flash Men* (see pages 4-7). Initially I spent time learning all about the technical specifications that need to be taken into account when producing digital images, as well as looking at national and international websites to see how other institutions were presenting digital versions of their collections. I also had to research best practice procedures for transcribing and indexing original manuscripts for display on the web. I produced the first draft of the transcription and developed the name and locality indexes and glossary of terms.

I have worked closely with our IT section in deciding how the manuscript will be electronically navigated, and assisted them with designing an Image Management Database which will be used in upcoming projects for the storage and display of digital collections of photographs.

Who is your favourite character from the *Registry of Flash Men* and why?

Thanks to the colourful descriptions of appearance and character by the author, we are introduced to many fascinating and interesting people. When reading the manuscript it often feels like you are looking out a window watching these characters pass by.

Aside from what we learn about the author via his observations of others, the other larger-than-life character I find interesting is a man by the name of Bloomfield. Miles describes him as 'an enormous glutton' who ate '21/2 lbs of mutton chops [for] breakfast' and gives details of his fraudulent activities around town, accompanied by a young girl posing as his niece. He was so infamous there was a newspaper article published in the *Sydney Herald*, warning polite society to beware of him.

What do you think is gained and what is lost when you digitise a paper original?

When you digitise paper originals you can recapture information that may have been lost. With scanning technology you can draw out writing that may have become so faint over the years that it is no longer visible to the naked eye. Through digitising you can restore a record which may have suffered through environmental factors or human neglect. What you lose is the tangible sense of history, and the sense of awe that you feel when you look at an original document that was written so long ago.

What digital projects or websites do you admire?

The benchmark, in terms of digitisation, has been set by the US Library of Congress *American Memory* website. I think at present they have around seven million digital images you can access, and you can find anything and everything you want to know about digitisation at this site.

In Australia all the institutions have done excellent jobs with their digitisation programs. The *Matthew Flinders Collection* on the State Library of New South Wales website is well worth a visit, and their pictorial database *PICMAN* is a well known favourite with the public. I also really liked the National Library of Australia's project *Edmund Barton: Our First Prime Minister* and the State Library of Victoria's *Goodall Diaries: Diaries of a Working Man*.

What digital projects are coming up next?

The next phase of the Digitisation Program will see us concentrating on two photographic collections. The first is titled *Lantern Slides of NSW and the Franco-British Exhibition*, which portrays typical rural scenes and suburban homes in NSW from 1905-1908. The slides were exhibited at the Franco-British Exhibition of Science, Arts, and Industries held in London in 1908.

The second collection is the official Government set of 2500 photographs, documenting the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. ●●●

