

# ACARM's Position in the Ever-changing World of Archives

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## Introduction

The archives and records management profession is highly specialised and relatively small: this can be isolating for many records professionals. Notwithstanding, it is most encouraging to think about the active international community that shares its challenges in the field of archives. The champion of the sector, on an international level, is the International Council on Archives (ICA), which provides its members with a golden opportunity to network.<sup>1</sup> Participants in ICA activities can easily build bridges with other institutions or individuals in similar sectors. International activity makes one understand the value of professional interaction. It provides one with a network of friends coming from the same specialised background and exposes one to the cultural and professional diversity of the sector. Furthermore, it provides easy access to technical solutions to a vast array of challenges, which the practical implementation of theoretical principles often entails.

My first participation in an ICA activity was at the 1999 International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) in Budapest.<sup>2</sup> I was lucky enough to collaborate with a records manager in Malta who had already refined her skills in various aspects of the profession – Hella Jean Bartolo Winston. She entered the field of records management quite late in her career at the Central Bank of Malta.<sup>3</sup> However, in a short span of time she managed to leave a mark on the

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1 ICA was set up in 1948 with the mission to strive to protect and ensure access to archives through advocacy, setting standards, professional development, and enabling dialogue between archivists, policy makers, creators and users of archives.

2 The XXXIV CITRA conference was held in Budapest, Hungary, between 6 and 9 October 1999.

3 Hella Jean Bartolo Winston (1950–2004) did her Master's degree in Overseas Records Management and Archive Administration at the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, University College London. She was active in the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) International both as International Ambassador and later as International Director of ARMA International. She participated in activities of ACARM and also made a valuable contribution to a number of training manuals developed by IRMT. Together with the author of this article she founded the Friends of the National Archives of Malta in 2000. Hella was also planning to apply for



profession not only in Malta but also through her international involvement with the Association of Records Managers and Administrators and ICA. Apart from these commitments, Winston was also an active promoter of the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) and it was she who introduced me to the Association and also to Anne Thurston, with whom she had already built an excellent working relationship.<sup>4</sup>

This essay focuses on the importance of international participation in a sector as small and as specialised as the management of archives and records. It attempts to analyse the general international archival framework steered by ICA and how ACARM fits into the framework. The study draws on the governance documentation of both institutions and also on personal experiences in a number of roles in both institutions. The first focus will be on ICA and how it provides the international framework for the sector.

### The International Council on Archives

Initiatives aimed at creating international collaboration in the field of archives pre-date the Second World War. In 1931, the Institute for Intellectual Co-operation, under the League of Nations, created a Permanent Consultative Committee on Archives. A few years later, that committee published the first *International Guide on Archives*. Those initiatives paved the way for the official establishment of the International Council on Archives on 9 June 1948, now commemorated annually as International Archives Day. Under the direction of its first chairman, Charles Samaran, the organisation started bridge-building with other stakeholders in the cultural and information management fields, such as the International Federation of Library Associations, the International Council of Museums, and the International Council on Monuments and Sites. Another milestone in the ICA's history came in 1950 with the convening of the first assembly and congress, and the publishing of *Archivum*, the official journal of the organisation. These seminal events shaped the character of the organisation that exists today.

Gradually, the ICA developed into a large and highly complex organisation. This is in part a result of the wide international acceptance of ICA as a leading organisation in the sector. The widespread and diverse membership has meant that, over the years, the structures have become rather cumbersome in order to

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admission to the doctoral programme in records and information studies at the Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto. Unfortunately, her plans were cut short as she died in June 2004. In remembrance of Hella, the National Archives of Malta published a volume of Essays: Farrugia, C. (ed.), *Guardians of Memory: essays in Remembrance of Hella Jean Bartolo Winston*, Malta 2008.

4 The collaboration networks Winston built are explained in detail in Thurston, A., Arden, C., and Lemieux, V., 'International Gifts', in Farrugia, C. (ed.), *Guardians of Memory: Essays in Remembrance of Hella Jean Bartolo Winston*, Malta 2008, 13–18.



accommodate and welcome the diversity of international priorities. To manage this efficiently, ICA developed a membership structure grouped into a number of categories.

**Table 18.1 Categories of membership in ICA**

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| Category A | Central archives directorates or national archival institutions, and equivalent bodies of member states of federal or similar countries.  |
| Category B | Associations composed of persons or corporate bodies, interested professionally in the administration or preservation of records and archives or in archival training; International associations composed of persons or corporate bodies, interested professionally in the administration or preservation of records and archives or in archival training and education. |
| Category C | Institutions or companies concerned with the administration or preservation of records and archives, or with archival training and education.   |
| Category D | Individuals working in the field of the administration or preservation of records and archives, or of the archival training and education, in the past or present.  |

The breadth of the membership structure was instrumental in rendering ICA so diverse, both in number of members and also in its geographical coverage. The membership network managed to capture the whole archives sector, from the national archives which, in most countries, leads government record-keeping, to individuals who practise the profession outside of formal organisational structures.

The creation of category B membership was, in itself, an incentive for establishing associations that can work at arm's length from the ICA. While having complete autonomy in their decision-making, associations can still benefit from the wide network and infrastructure of the ICA in support of their projects and initiatives. This structure provided fertile ground for the archival institutions in Commonwealth countries to come together and form an association.

### **The Commonwealth Archivists Association**

The Commonwealth Archivists Association was established in 1984 with the scope of linking archivists and archival institutions across the Commonwealth. Anne Thurston played a key role in establishing the association, working principally with Mr B.C. Bloomfield, chairman of the ad hoc organising committee, and Mr A.J. Farrington of the India Office Library and Records, to obtain the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation. The inaugural meeting was held on Sunday, 16 September 1984 at the Beethovenhalle in Bonn



in parallel with the 10th International Conference on Archives.<sup>5</sup> During that meeting, Bloomfield presented a discussion paper on a possible programme for the new organisation. Following a proposal by Dr Geoffrey Martin, then Keeper of the Public Records in the UK, and seconded by Mr H.S. Cobb, the provisional constitution was approved. The meeting also elected the first committee for the organisation, comprising:

Chairman: Dr G.H. Martin (Keeper, Public Record Office, London);  
 Mr A.J. Farrington (India Office Library and Records, London);  
 Ms A. Burdett (Public Archives of Canada);  
 Mr A. Akinfemiwa (Director, National Archives of Nigeria);  
 Mr B. Cox (Director General, Australian Archives);  
 Mrs A. Kamba (Director, National Archives of Zimbabwe);  
 Dr R.K. Perti (Director, National Archives of India);  
 Miss H. Rowe (Archivist, National Archives of Bermuda);  
 Mr B. Weilbrenner (Deputy Dominion Archivist, Public Archives of Canada);  
 Mrs Zakiah Hanum Nor (Director General, National Archives of Malaysia).<sup>6</sup>

In late 1995, the decision was taken to change the name of the organisation from the Commonwealth Archivists Association to the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers. Thurston was instrumental in this step, which clarified that the scope of the organisation was not to be restrictive but rather to embrace all those involved in the life cycle management of records.

The aims of ACARM, as defined in the Association's constitution, are:

- To promote the development of professional archival and records management standards in the Commonwealth;
- To reinforce the importance archives and records should have in the national heritage and in programmes of national development;
- To promote the development of professional archival and records management education and training throughout the Commonwealth;
- To permit archivists and records managers who share a common heritage to compare, exchange, share and develop their common experiences;
- To encourage the dissemination of information, e.g. photographic copies of archival material, amongst member institutions;

5 Commonwealth Archivists Association, *Newsletter*, No. 1, July 1985, 3. The meeting brought together 47 participants from the following countries: Nigeria, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Ghana, Gambia, United Kingdom, Australia, Malawi, Nigeria, Belize, Antigua and Barbuda, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Botswana, Kenya, Barbados, Malaysia, Brunei, Cook Island, Guyana, India, Bermuda, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Vanuatu, Northern Ireland, Fiji, Sierra Leone and Canada.

6 *ACARM Newsletter* 1, 4.



- To promote an increased awareness of the Commonwealth through the exploitation of archives and records in teaching; and
- To encourage the formation and continued development of professional and archival records management associations in individual countries of the Commonwealth.

The statute of ACARM clearly specifies that the aims of the organisation are to be pursued in cooperation and consultation with the International Council on Archives and its regional branches. ACARM is a fully independent association that does not fall under the direct management of ICA or any of the other international networks. However, collaboration with ICA and other international organisations forms the bedrock of its existence.

The membership structure of ACARM aims to reach the widest possible audience. Membership is structured into two categories, institutional and individual. The criteria for membership eligibility are rather wide and are intended to be as inclusive as possible. Basically, any organisation managing archives or practising records management in a Commonwealth country is eligible to join as an institutional member. Even when it comes to individual membership, the constitution of ACARM states that 'individual members of staff, past or present, of an archival institution or repository in any Commonwealth country, or of any other interested persons, are eligible for individual membership'.<sup>7</sup>

### **Supporters of ACARM**

ACARM derives most of its support from the Commonwealth Foundation and the International Records Management Trust (IRMT). The Commonwealth Foundation was established as a charity under English law in 1965.<sup>8</sup> Its mission is to 'develop the capacity of Civil Society to act together and learn from each other to engage with the institutions that shape people's lives'. It has undergone a number of reforms, often in line with the general priorities and policies of the Commonwealth, as defined and approved at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. While the foundation provides the main source of funding to ACARM, the IRMT provides both logistical support and the academic and intellectual framework for its educational activities. The IRMT is a UK-registered charity created in 1989 and governed by a board of trustees. Its main objective as defined in the memorandum and articles of association is the advancement

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<sup>7</sup> Constitution of the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers, 4(ii).

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth Foundation website: [www.commonwealthfoundation.com](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com). [Accessed 8 June 2013].



of education in the management, control and administration of public records.<sup>9</sup> It has worked with numerous governments over the years to help strengthen records systems.<sup>10</sup> One of the IRMT's major achievements is in fulfilling its educational mission. It has developed the Management of Public Sector Records (MPSR) study programme, which is now widely used in the training of archives and records management professionals in a number of countries. The aim of the project was to empower professionals in countries and regions in the developing world to raise their standard of records and archives management. Apart from proving successful in terms of the content and presentation of the resources, the project was also successful from a collaboration-across-borders point of view. The mix of professionals from different countries in the composition of writing teams made it possible to overcome bias or undue focus on aspects that are relevant to only one particular situation or community. The collaboration in the MPSR project was highlighted in the report Mr George MacKenzie presented on behalf of Dr Anne Thurston, Executive Director of IRMT, to the 5th Delegates Meeting of ICA in 1998.<sup>11</sup>

### **Common Challenges for ICA and ACARM**

Although the remit and membership base of ICA and ACARM are different, they share common features and also face common challenges. They both represent archivists and records managers and thus both experience the lack of understanding and, often, the apathy of administrators and politicians towards record-keeping. Another challenge is the blurred demarcation between the core of our profession and parallel professions, such as those of knowledge management, librarianship, and curation of cultural activities and sites. The ever-increasing electronic environment we have to operate in poses the threat of disparities in development between different countries and regions. This is a challenge as both ICA and ACARM have to develop the best strategies to remain at the forefront of these developments, without abandoning the duty to support members in less developed countries and regions. What follows are some reflections on two basic challenges both ICA and ACARM have to face: transmitting the political message, and the financial sustainability of the organisations.

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9 Memorandum and Articles of Association of the International Records Management Trust, 20 November 1997, Article 3.1.

10 International Records Management Trust website: [www.irmt.org](http://www.irmt.org). [Accessed 8 June 2013].

11 The meeting was held on 11 September 1998 in Stockholm, Sweden, and was chaired by ICA president Mr Wang Gang. NAM, File LAD/NL/4/1999, Minutes of meeting dated 11 September 1998, 4.



### *Transmitting the Political Message*

The way in which the ICA has communicated its professional and political message has, so far, been mainly through the yearly resolutions issued at the end of the CITRA or the congress AGMs. The way resolutions were formulated in preparation for the ICA annual general meeting might have led to wishlists rather than structured priority actions. The system was to appoint a resolutions committee with the role of accepting recommendations from delegates. At the end of the process, the committee used to group the resolutions together and try to rationalise them into a final set of recommendations. I question whether these resolutions affect governments in member countries, and almost no data exists on whether there were any actions taken in the various countries as a direct or indirect result of the ICA resolutions.

ACARM's input into these resolutions seems very minimal. While ACARM makes best use of the fact that a number of its members are grouped together in one place for its convening of AGMs and professional seminars, this is almost the only use made of the ICA infrastructure. In preparation for this article, I reviewed the recommendations approved by AGMs for a number of years and tried to see to what extent the work of ACARM or suggestions by ACARM featured. I found very few specific references to the work of ACARM or the needs of the archives sector in Commonwealth countries.<sup>12</sup> The fact that the ICA is a non-governmental organisation renders the recommendations less authoritative. Furthermore, there is no in-built mechanism to follow up on the implementation or even dissemination of the recommendations.<sup>13</sup> Apart from this, both ACARM and ICA need to be diplomatic in their approach due to the diverse political systems and situations in the various countries from which membership originates.

### *The Financial Sustainability of the Organisations*

Both ICA and ACARM rely mainly on membership dues. The challenge of maintaining sound finances is ever-present, especially considering that the expectations of members are increasing. The shift from the traditional way of operating into a technological environment also brings with it the need for further financial investment. Both ICA and ACARM have found generous support when it comes to operating premises. The director of the national archives of France has

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12 The specific recommendation stated 'noting the successful forum of Commonwealth national archivists and archival educators held in South Africa in September 2002'. The 2002 CITRA was held in Marseille with the theme 'How does society perceive archives?' with the AGM held on 15 November 2002.

13 The system for a number of years was that delegates pass their suggestions to the deputy secretary general and a resolutions committee put together the list, subsequently presented to the AGM to vote on. The meeting at the end of the XXXV Citra in Reykjavik on 13 October 2001 approved a list of 11 recommendations.



been supporting the ICA with accommodation for their offices in Paris. The same can be said of the generous support IRMT has provided ACARM, although the needs of ACARM are less demanding than those of the ICA.

Notwithstanding, the issue of membership remains a point of contention. How is it possible to generate enough revenue to sustain the organisation to effectively pursue its goals without having prohibitive membership rates? How can one have a system that guarantees a fair distribution of the financial burden of sustaining the organisation, taking into consideration the disparity of available resources between the various members?

In 2004, the ICA started a consultation process with members, highlighting the need to revise membership rates and structures, also due to the fluctuation between the American dollar (used as the ICA's currency) and the Euro.<sup>14</sup> The decision to draft a new rates structure was taken at the Curaçao meeting in 2006 and formed part of the so-called Curaçao Consensus.<sup>15</sup> The concept adopted by the ICA was that of having a fees structure based on fairness, transparency and the ability to pay. The big debate was about what to peg fees to. The system used by the ICA was one based on gross national income and gross national income per capita. The strengths of the system emerge from the international yardsticks used, however the wealth of the country in most cases is not reflected in the budgets allocated to national archives, nor to individual members who make a living from the profession and want to join an international organisation.

ACARM is much smaller than the ICA and does not have the complex hierarchy of the ICA. Over the years, it has managed to keep fees relatively low, always taking into consideration the financial capabilities of some of its member countries. However, this means that it has not been possible to have a constant flow of income apart from the grant from the Commonwealth Foundation. This hinders certain projects since Commonwealth Foundation funding is project-based and targeted at very specific tasks. Maybe the time is ripe to put this issue on the agenda of future ACARM meetings.

### **Recent Changes in ICA**

The effectiveness of the ICA in fulfilling its mission has been under the spotlight at the various meetings of the organisation. Critics have said that the ICA is too bureaucratic and that this makes it difficult for members to participate fully in

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14 NAM File LAD/NL/4/1999. Letter from ICA president Prof. Lorenz Mikoletzky to members, dated 9 December 2004.

15 The Curaçao Consensus was approved by the annual general meeting of the ICA on 24 November 2006. It provided an action plan aimed at better management planning, more effective governance, and sound finances built around a new fees structure. The full document is available at: [www.eae.org.gr/Texts/ICA\\_Curacao-Consensus-2006.pdf](http://www.eae.org.gr/Texts/ICA_Curacao-Consensus-2006.pdf). [Accessed on 21 May 2013].



the organisation. In order to make it more responsive to today's needs, the ICA embarked on a review of its constitution. Following extensive consultation, the ICA's new constitution was approved on 24 August 2012 during the annual general meeting in Brisbane. The scope of the reform was to simplify the ICA's governance, strengthen its democratic structures, and increase opportunities for archivists throughout the world who wish to participate in the organisation.

One of the major changes is in the format and hosting of the CITRA conference. The meetings of the CITRA Bureau held on 16 and 21 November 2009 in Malta saw the bureau preparing to wrap up its business to pave the way for a new structure.<sup>16</sup> After the Malta meetings, the ICA took a new approach to organising its annual convention. The name changed from CITRA to the Annual Conference. This brought with it a change to how the theme and host country are selected. But will the change bring about a better chance for Commonwealth countries to participate effectively, especially through the hosting of events as prestigious as CITRA was?

The previous CITRA Bureau brought in representatives from the various regions of ICA membership. It also brought in the hosts of the international congress and the CITRA events falling within a four-year period between one congress and another. The structure provided for continuity of the themes to be discussed, as the congress paved the way for the themes of the intermediate years. Thus the bureau was a highly democratic structure, strong in representation and an effective forum to pass on expertise from one host country to another. Organising CITRA was not only an intellectual challenge, but a costly exercise that required strong organisation by the host institution. It also required a diversity of opinions and sectoral views due to the sensitivity of hosting a diverse audience, which brings with it cultural and religious traditions that have to be respected.<sup>17</sup>

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16 The last CITRA Bureau was composed of the following members: Didier Grange, ICA Deputy Secretary General acting as Secretary; Atakilt Assefa Asgedom, Director General of the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia representing Africa and Arab countries; Sangmin Lee, from the Research Institute for Korean Archives and Records, representing Asia and Oceania; Gérard Ernisse, Chargé de mission, Direction des Archives de France representing Europe and North America; Alicia Casas de Barran, Director of the Archivo General de la Nación, Uruguay, representing Latin America and the Caribbean; Hédi Jallab, Inspector General at the National Archives of Tunisia as a general member; Charles Farrugia, National Archivist of Malta as host country representative 2009; Ivar Fonnes, Director General of the Riksarkivet of Norway as host country representative 2010; Severiano Hernández Vicente, Sub-Director General of the Archivos Estatales of Spain as host country representative 2011; Ross Gibbs, Director of the National Archives of Australia and ICA International Congress representative 2012; Ian Wilson, ICA President; Tomas Lidman, ICA Vice-President Finance; David Leitch, ICA Secretary General; Annick Carteret, responsible for logistics.

17 My experience in hosting CITRA 2009 made me realise how challenging it is to meet the demands of such a diverse audience. We hosted 251 delegates coming from 90 different countries.



The downside of the CITRA Bureau was that the structure was rather bureaucratic in decision-making, especially about the topics to be discussed and the selection of speakers. However, I still believe that its benefits far outweighed its weaknesses and one still has to assess whether the new arrangements put in place to replace the CITRA Bureau will be successful or not.<sup>18</sup>

### The Way Forward

If I had to highlight one word that in my opinion should become the guiding principle for ACARM in future, it would be 'networking'. ACARM is and will remain a small organisation with limited resources. But as an organisation we also have our richness. ACARM covers a very large territory and includes a diversity of languages and cultures. Through networking, best use can be made of this diversity and we can grow beyond our current limits. Networking means building collaborative programmes with other stakeholders who can support and facilitate our mission. It does not necessarily have to be the traditional stakeholders we have already worked with.<sup>19</sup> A number of meetings exploring potential collaboration were already held with other organisations, such as the Society of Archivists of the United Kingdom. The collaboration can also be in non-traditional forms such as:

- Facilitating access to e-journals and other specialist tools through the negotiation of group licences in partnership with universities;
- Giving benefits to members in the form of support in attending conferences and training events;
- Creation of a database of professional expertise;
- Setting up of a scheme of professional placements;
- Sharing of professional information about conservation methodology and other specialist services;
- Take best advantage of the participation of its members in international events such as the Forum of National Archivists.

This cannot be done if we do not renew the organisation and become more responsive to the needs of members and the sector alike. To this effect, the

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18 ICA Constitution: Article 14; The executive board decides the place, date and theme of the ICA Annual Conference, at least two years before the date of the conference. The professional programme of the Annual Conference of ICA, and the academic matters related to it, are prepared by the Programme Commission, as defined in Article 12 of the constitution. Responsibility for the practical organisation of the ICA annual conference rests with the secretary general, the secretariat and the partners associated with the event.

19 Even in the past, there were small initiatives of great benefit to members. In 1999, ACARM distributed 150 copies of the booklet *Digital Culture*. The publication was a donation by the National Preservation Office of the British Library.



AGM on 28 October 2011 in Toledo endorsed a proposal that I tabled for a general overhaul of our constitution. Following lengthy discussions and a lot of groundwork, it is hoped that this renewal process is confirmed at the annual conference AGM in Brussels on 22 November 2013. Only through renewal can our organisation continue to support archives and records management throughout the Commonwealth.