Evidence and Metadata: An Introduction
Children Overboard: A Recordkeeping Case Study

During the last national election campaign, we were told that refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, in a boat intercepted by an Australian Navy ship, had thrown their children overboard to force the Navy to rescue them and to land in Australia.

We were presented with the evidence – two photographs of children in the water with adults. The government claimed these photographs had been taken on 7 October 2001 – remember this date.

One of the photographs is on the next slide.
The Background

• Increasing numbers of “boat people”
• Detention of “illegal immigrants” in desert camps
• Operation Relex – naval blockade of the Indian Ocean, directed from Canberra by People Smuggling Taskforce, the objective being to stop “boat people” from reaching Australian territory
• Information flows often based on verbal communication
• Tight media controls imposed
• 11 September 2001
• National Election Campaign October-November 2001
The *Olong* – 6-7 October 2001

- **6 October:**
  - HMAS *Adelaide* intercepts *Olong*, overloaded with 223 refugees, including many children

- **7 October**
  - Warning shots fired and boarding party take control
  - Jumbled message relayed via telephone to People Smuggling Taskforce - children being thrown overboard
  - Fourth hand version conveyed to Minister of Immigration by mobile telephone as he went into a media briefing where he repeated the story to the press, then rang the PM and Defence Minister to brief them
  - Chair of Taskforce confirms story in report faxed to all Ministers
  - Children Overboard story off and running
  - Demonisation of boat people had begun
8 October 2001 – the miraculous rescue

- *Olong* sinking and HMAS *Adelaide* orders refugees to abandon ship; men, women and children jump into the water; HMAS *Adelaide* sailors also jump into water to help rescue the refugees; all 223 refugees rescued

- Photographs of sailors rescuing children in water, dated 8 October and captioned “Courage”, and “Courage and Determination” emailed to senior Navy officers

- The photograph captioned “Courage” is on the next slide – recognise it?

- The following slides show the context in which the photograph was taken
Text of Email Accompanying the Photographs

“The attached photos are forwarded for dissemination as considered appropriate:

ABBM Laura Whittle was recently photographed as the Navy value “COURAGE”. During the 8 October rescue of 223 SUNC’s from a sinking Indonesian fishing vessel, Able Seaman Laura Whittle again typified this true quality through her immense courage in leaping 12 metres from the ship’s 02 deck into the water to drag women and children to the safety of a liferaft. Selflessly she entered the water without a lifejacket and without regard for her own safety to help others in need.

LSCK Jason ‘Dogs’ Barker shows dogged determination as he helped rescue women and children by dragging them to safety during the rescue of 223 SUNCs from a sinking Indonesian fishing vessel. This big hearted leading seaman also demonstrated Navy’s core value of COURAGE.”

Truth Overboard

- In response to press demands for proof of 7 October Children Overboard claim, Minister for Defence releases photographs without date and captions, and digitally altered so that it was no longer clear that the adults with the children included sailors; the Minister also claims there is videotape of the incident.
- Copies of the photographs shown on TV and published in media as evidence that the refugees threw their children overboard; reports feature the PM’s comments that “these are not the kind of people we want in Australia”.
- See PDF file of The Age 11 October 2001 front page.
The Aftermath

• In fact there is no evidence in the records – the ship’s log, signals, email from the Adelaide, operation reports from the Captain and officers, videotapes, video logs and photographs of the operation, or the remembered oral record of telephone calls and other communications – of any children being thrown overboard

• The fiction is maintained until after the 10 November election when the government is returned to office

• Subsequently a series of inquiries by the military and Parliament (the Bryant Report) confirm that no children were thrown overboard

• Yet the powerfully emotive construct of the Children Overboard, engendered by the “false record” lives on in the national psyche
The written advice in the Taskforce paper and the OTA report may, however, have contributed to a belief by Ministers in subsequent days that there was evidence to support the initial reports.

3.2 Imagery of SIEV 4 incidents

3.2.1 The sinking of SIEV 4 on 8 October 2001

Following the boarding of SIEV 4 on 7 October, it was turned northwards and escorted by the HMAS ADELAIDE to the edge of the Australian contiguous zone where the boarding party was extricated. Passengers on board the SIEV carried out various acts of sabotage. HMAS ADELAIDE continued to monitor the progress of the SIEV from a distance of around 3 nautical miles. At 2142 on 7 October HMAS ADELAIDE took the SIEV in tow. Late on the afternoon of 8 October (1925 AEST) the SIEV began to sink and a number of passengers, including women and children, found themselves in the water. Those in the water were assisted by members of the crew of HMAS ADELAIDE, and all passengers from the SIEV were rescued and brought aboard HMAS ADELAIDE by 2200 (AEST) before the SIEV finally sank a short while later. The passengers remained on board HMAS ADELAIDE until disembarked at Christmas Island at around 1834 on 10 October.

The following photographs (which show children in the water) were taken during the sinking, but later came to be misrepresented as providing evidence in support of the reports of children being thrown overboard on 7 October.

Extract from Bryant Report

Caption:

Photograph 1 was saved as “laura the hero” and was attached to the email under the words “Whittle “COURAGE””
Extract from Bryant Report

Caption:

Photograph 2 was saved as “dogs and his family” and was attached to the email under the words “Barker “COURAGE” and “DETERMINATION”.”
Recordkeeping and Archiving Processes

• Creating documents as archival traces of an act or event (the photographs)
• Transforming archival traces of acts and events into records which can function as evidence of those acts and events (the photographs with their captions and dates (= metadata), and accompanying email, captured in recordkeeping systems with related documents
• Organising all of the records of an individual, group or corporate body into an archive which functions as individual, group or corporate memory
• Pluralising the individual, group or corporate archive as accessible collective memory
Recordkeeping Systems

• “Fix” the content of records (the data)
• Re-present their structure or documentary form (enabled by metadata) – for explanation of documentary form, see example of Horison letter in IMS 5010 Topic 1 lecture notes
• Persistently link records to information (= metadata) about
  – their context (about who created them, in relation to what social or organisational activity, what other records they are related to)
  – their management (an audit trail of records management events, e.g. creation and classification of record, disposal actions relating to the record, migration action, access and use)
Examples of Record Capture

Capture of copies of photographs of the “miraculous rescue” into recordkeeping systems, where they become part of the record of an individual or organisation, e.g.

- Copies in recordkeeping system of HMAS *Adelaide*, or Navy HQ
  – with their captions, dates and copies of accompanying email become records of the ship or Navy HQ
- Copies without captions, dates and copies of accompanying email in Minister of Defence’s office records, or in the recordkeeping systems of various newspaper and media organisations – become records of the Minister or media organisation
- Copies kept by individual sailors – become part of personal or family records
- Copies, with and without captions, dates and copies of accompanying email, tendered as evidence to various inquiries – become part of the records of those inquiries.
Examples of Organisation and Pluralisation

- Photographs within the context of all of the records of the ship, the Navy, the Minister, the media organisation, the individual sailor, the inquiry – become part of an archive – “evidence of me”, part of the corporate or individual memory
- The corporate or personal archive of the ship, the Navy, the Minister, the inquiry, the media organisation, the individual sailor – become part of the archives of the government of Australia, a business archives collection, or collections of personal archive(s) – “evidence of us”, part of our collective memory
Conceptual Models of Recordkeeping: Figure 1

Figure 1 tells the following story:

- People do business of all kinds with each other. In the course of doing business, they create and manage records. The records created in the course of doing business capture in documentary form the business done. Business is here defined in the very broadest sense to encompass social and organisational activity of all kinds.

Example: In relation to the events of 6-8 October 2001, the “business” activity is related to the government functions of border protection and administration of immigration law; the agents involved include HMAS Adelaide, her crew, the refugees, the Navy, and the People Smuggling Task Force, and the records include the photographs, emails, the ship’s videotapes, logs, and operation reports.
Figure 1: The Business

- BUSINESS
- Is Documented In
- RECORDS
- Are Used By
- Create & Manage
- Do
- PEOPLE [AGENTS]
Conceptual Models of Recordkeeping: Figure 2

Figure 2 simply says:

– Optimally recordkeeping forms an integral part of any business activity.
Figure 2: Recordkeeping

- Business
  - Integrated In
  - Documented In
  - Record, Manage, Enable Use

- People [Agents]
  - Do
  - Create
  - Used By

- Records
Conceptual Models of Recordkeeping:

Figure 3

Figure 3 tells us:

– People do business in social and organisational contexts that are governed by external mandates (e.g. social mores and conditioning, laws, regulations, standards, best practice codes, professional ethics) and internal mandates (e.g. corporate culture, policies, administrative instructions, delegations, authorities). Mandates establish in both formal and informal ways who is responsible for what, and govern social and organisational activity and recordkeeping behaviours. Authentic records of social and organisational activity provide evidence of that activity and function as corporate and collective memory. They also provide authoritative sources of value added information as they capture both the content and context of the interactions they document. And they account for the execution of the mandate – internally and externally, currently and over time.

Example of Mandates relating to the events of 6-8 October 2001 include Australian Immigration Law, and international conventions relating to the rescue of people at sea.
Figure 3: The Business Context

MANDATES

Governs

Establish Competencies Of
People [Agents]
Are Responsible For

Authenticate
Function as corporate & collective memory of
Provide authoritative sources of information

BUSINESS

Account For Execution Of
Records
Are Evidence Of
Archives as Evidence of Us

• Fixed (content and structure) AND mutable (layers of context) – always in a process of becoming
• Multiple purposes as instruments of power, governance and accountability, identity shapers, memory stores, & trusted sources
• Can also be instruments of oppression and abuse of power
• Archives as product of urge to witness, to evidence, to memorialise – which has its dark counterpart in deliberate acts of “killing the memory”, memoricide
• Archives as structures of remembering and forgetting – formed by deliberate and partial acts of selection, classification, and description
References


• Patrick Weller, *Don’t Tell the Prime Minister*, (Carlton: Scribe Publications, 2002).

• Figures 1-3 were developed as part of the Monash University, Strategic Partnership with Industry – Research & Training (SPIRT) Project, *Recordkeeping Metadata Standards for Managing and Accessing Information Resources in Networked Environments Over Time for Government, Commerce, Social and Cultural Purposes*  