

## **Pacific photographic collections in the Pacific Research Archives, Australian National University**

**By Karina Taylor, Pacific Archivist,  
Pacific Research Archives, Australian National University**

This paper was presented at a session called “Resources for Pacific History: recognition and access” at the Pacific History Association Conference held at the University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji on 12 December 2008.

\* \* \* \* \*

Good afternoon, I’m Karina Taylor the Pacific Archivist for the Pacific Research Archives or PRA at the Australian National University or the ANU.

The PRA was established at the ANU in February 2007, we are based in the ANU Archives Program. As such the PRA incorporates the Pacific collections held in the Noel Butlin Archives Centre and the ANU Archives.

Within the Noel Butlin there are the company papers of two big players in the Pacific, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited – CSR and the shipping company Burns Philp.

The primary function of the PRA is to collect the research papers of the Pacific scholars in the Pacific. Currently we have received a small number of collections with photographs included in them.

Today I will give you an overview of the photographs within these collections and show you some examples from these wonderful collections.

I will then discuss our processes of describing photographs, providing access to them and discuss a mystery collection which raises some issues for these processes.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited or CSR grew sugar, pineapples and operated sugar mills in the Pacific, particularly in Fiji. Their impact here in Fiji on all aspects of life is reflected in the large photographic material within the collection.

CSR were the main drivers behind bringing Indian labourers to Fiji to work in the fields, and mills; (photo) They employed and leased land from the Fijians (photo); they established infrastructure including railways and bridges (photo) needed to transport the cane.

The collection provides a record of many events during the 90 years CSR operated in Fiji. Including natural disasters (photo), agricultural shows (photos) and....

Earlier this year I curated an exhibition on CSR in Fiji for the annual Asia-Pacific week at the ANU. We digitised all the material used in the exhibition and I am now working with the IT people to create an online exhibition

Burns Philp ran shipping, tourism and supply stores throughout the Pacific, particularly in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The photograph collection includes, individual photographs and albums of the plantations, the workers, the shops and for people with an interest in shipping in the Pacific – there is a very extensive photographic record of the ships owned by the company.

Also within the Burns Philp magazine is a great collection of articles and photographs, from around the Pacific, some which are from the collection. Like the CSR collection the Burns Philp photograph collection provides a visual record of the Company's impact on the Islands it was involved in.

At the PRA we work with photographs in the same manner the rest of the ANU Archives Program does. Photographs are described as part of a collection and housed in archival photograph albums. We digitise on demand and accept digital photographs into the collection. Any digital material is stored in the University's digital repository 'D-Space'. Each digital photograph is described with metadata.

If there are no restrictions on the collection the photo can be put up on Picture Australia which increases search ability and access. People can also order copies of photos via Picture Australia.

The issue I wanted to raise regarding photographs is duplicates, ownership and description. Earlier this year the PRA received some transfers from the Pacific and Asian History records room.

Within these transfers were some further Jim Davidson papers and over 200 black and white photographs of the Pacific. I thought I had hit a treasure trove!

The photographs had been bundled together in envelopes addressed to Jim Davidson and Raymond Firth at the Admiralty Scot Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge.

From the markings on the backs of the photos I could tell that they had been measured up for a publication. This is when institutional knowledge is invaluable, Niel Gunson was able to tell me the photographs were collected for the 4 volume publication 'Pacific Islands', commissioned by the Naval Intelligence Divison of Great Britain, which was edited by Davidson and Raymond Firth. Since the books had been published in 1945, which means it's out of copyright I still was pretty pleased the collection.

So I started writing the metadata for each photo. Some were easy because I was able to find them in the volumes and use the caption. Others I was able to describe because a

description had been written on the back. It was with these I tried to find out more information about the scene or island group.

Using the handy search tool “google” I discovered many of these photographs were part of collections held elsewhere like from the Frank Hurley collection at the National Library of Australia, from the Von Hugel collection at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography and the E. Christophersen collection at the Bishop Museum in Hawai’i. This one was easy to identify where it came from – being a postcard with the photographer Beattie identified on the back.

This raised a lot of questions for me – does the PRA really have “ownership” over these photos considering the originals are in other institutions? Do we have the “right” to digitise and sell copies of these photos to researchers? Who should the researcher reference if they want to use the image in another publication?

Now usually this wouldn’t be such a problem, most books provide references to all images used in them but the volumes did not. If I hadn’t done further searching I wouldn’t have discovered this. I am not an expert on ownership or copyright issues but I imagine this would cause a bit of a problem!

I would like to finish now with raises these issues and maybe it will enable some discussion about these questions. Please feel free to also ask me about the other photograph collections from the PRA that I have described today.

Thank you.

\* \* \* \* \*