

## Illustrated Essay: Ann Curthoys' Diaries

The significance of the Freedom Rides of nineteen sixty-five has been hallmarked as an integral milestone in the push for recognition of Aboriginal People and Aboriginal Affairs. The diaries of Ann Curthoys (as seen below), who was a part of the Freedom Rides and Students Association for Aborigines (SAFA), has been an indispensable piece of evidence in recounting the narrative of the Freedom Rides and what challenges these people faced. As such, the online digital collection of her diaries on the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) website was a vital step in preserving the information while allowing accessibility to all. Throughout this essay, the knowledge within these diary entries will be discussed and analysed. Alongside this, the role of technology (taking the form of AIATSIS) in providing a safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to tell their stories and experiences will be covered. Finally, the challenges faced by such a collection such as control, accessibility and ownership will be covered. Each of these concepts will be analysed in accompaniment with other resources. Upon the conclusion of this essay, it will be established that digital collections and online platforms are to play an ever increasing and vital role in the lives and history of Aboriginal people; and therefore, of the whole of Australia.

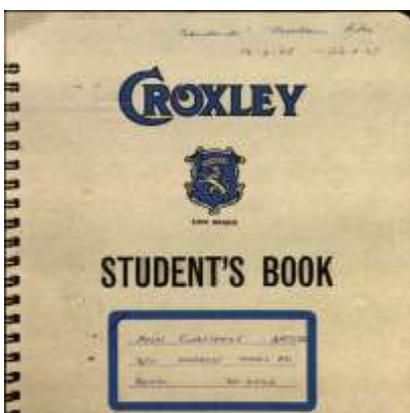


Figure 1- Cover page of Ann Curthoys Diary, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

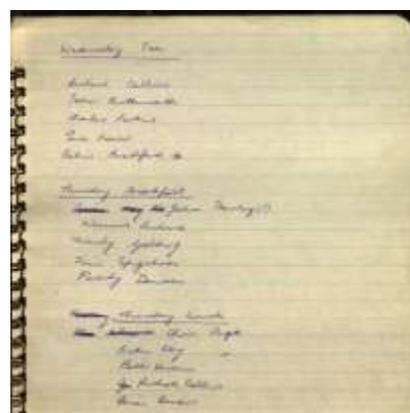


Figure 2- List of Members at the end of the Freedom Rides, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

Throughout the entries in her diaries, Ann Curthoys describes in detail, the events that took place at each town the Freedom Riders visited. In particular, she describes the events that occurred in Moree in detail (as seen below), while also going on to describe the conditions of several other missions in other rural towns. The events that took place in Moree during the Freedom Rides were some of the most challenging of the entire trip. Curthoys describes in particular the protests at the Moree Baths, of which Aboriginal people were not allowed admittance. The beginning of their time in Moree was taken up mostly by official business, like sending letters and taking interviews (Curthoys, pp. 7-9 1965). It was not until after this that they began protesting. As Curthoys states;

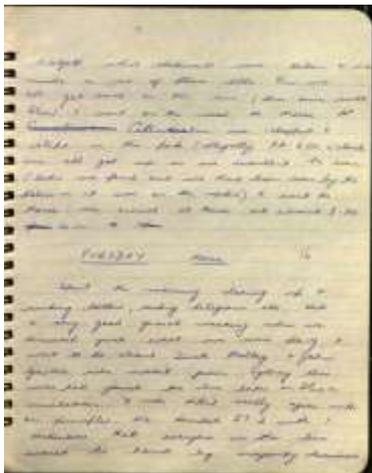


Figure 3- Page 7 of Ann Curthoys Diary; detailing arrival in Moree, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

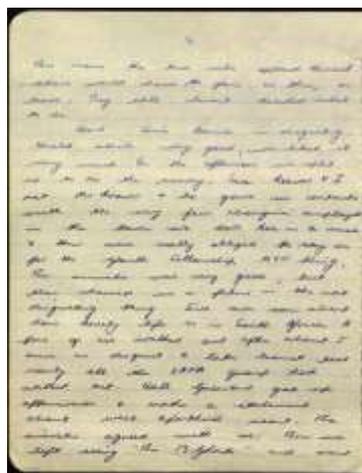


Figure 4- Page 8 of Ann Curthoys Diary; describing plans for organising protest, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

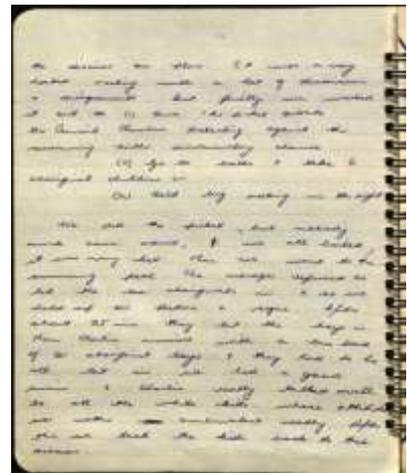


Figure 5- Page 10 of Ann Curthoys Diary; describing the protests and resistance met at the Moree baths; sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

*“The[n] we went to the swimming pool. The manager refused to let the six aboriginals in and so we held up our posters and signs. After about 25 mins they let the boys in. Then Charlie arrived with a bus load of 21 aboriginal boys and they had to be all let in.”* (Curthoys p.10 1965).

This initial protest that was led by Charlie Perkins in the early days of the Freedom Rides was rather passive in comparison to when they returned to the town a second time, in which the bus was almost run off the road.

Due to the detail that Curthoys covers in her entries, the majority of the content is quite distressing; in terms of the experiences of the people and what the Freedom Riders witnessed (as viewed below).

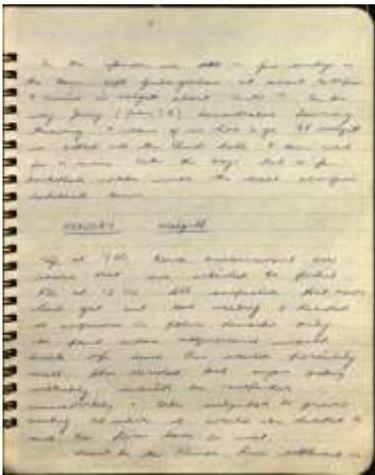


Figure 6- Page 3 of Ann Curthoys Diary, detailing conditions of mission via interviews, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

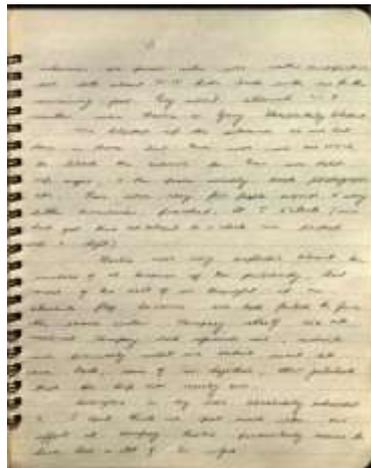


Figure 7- Page 35 of Ann Curthoys Diary, detailing violent protests in Bowraville, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

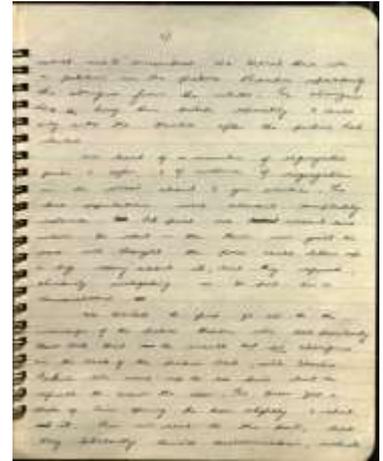


Figure 8- Page 31 of Ann Curthoys, details of racism and segregation in Bowraville, sourced from <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/freedom-ride/ann-curthoys-diaries>

The format in which the entries are structured, of the first person, have quite the impact on this also. The majority of interviews between Ann Curthoys and those on the mission further move to demonstrate the harsh realities and severe segregation, events that, as Edmonds expresses (2012), were done out of routine and convention. She states on page nine of her diary (Curthoys 1965) that many of the responses she received were very subdued. This was due to the manager of the mission and press patrolling the grounds. This is only one of many incidents.

It is small details such as this that are often left out of the story, in order to deliver the bigger picture to the audience. McCallum & Waller discuss this in their work (2018), where

they cover the role of technology (the medium of Television) and media in delivering an activist's agenda. Although the topic they covered, being that of the nineteen sixty-seven referendum to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people citizens under the constitution; the general concept is the same. That most individuals miss out on important details in favour of simply knowing the basics; this can also be said about the Freedom Rides. If one were to ask an Australian what the Freedom Rides were, many would say a protest for Aboriginal Rights or justice. However, if you asked whether they knew exactly what occurred, there is less likelihood of getting a correct answer. Through the digitisation of Ann Curthoys diaries, this information is made available and has the potential to fill that void.

The use on online platforms and digital medias has become an avenue through which Aboriginal people can express their stories, culture and history in a safe environment. It is these avenues that have also returned a sense of self-determination and reconciliation to many Aboriginal people. McClellan & Tanner discuss in their work (2011) of the importance that archived material has come to play in Aboriginal communities. It is a way for these communities to receive knowledge and give knowledge. In regards to the AIATSIS website, it is an example of how this giving and receiving knowledge has come to be. Furthermore, it has also become a resource for articles and artefacts pertaining to Aboriginal history, such as the digital collection of Ann Curthoys diaries. The function of the digital collection is to provide recorded information on the Freedom Rides that took place. Russell (2005) mentions in her work about the issue of having an outlet to allow for Indigenous perspectives in regards to historical archives and resources; the AIATSIS website is an online source that is dedicated to this. Historically, there has been a suppression on Aboriginal stories and history. It is only now with recent social changes and the rise of new technologies that there has been an emergence of archived works to provide for what has been missing, with cases such as those covered by Christie & Verran (2013) becoming more common.

Byrne, Gardiner, McDonald & Thorpe (2011) describe this as digital repatriation. It is deemed an important aspect to any online resource that involves archival sources, especially in regards to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Most sites or institutions are encouraged to have a policy or guideline that allows for both access to and authorisation to categorise in terms of cultural protocol for Indigenous people. The diaries of Ann Curthoys fall under the tab of digital collections, and is a sub heading under the Freedom Rides exhibition. The AIATSIS website has rules and guidelines outlined on their website, however they are located in separate sections. Under the tab Caring for Collections, the guidelines for audio storage and operation is as follows;

*“IASA Guidelines and operate in accordance with the Australian Institute of Cultural Materials (AICCM) Code of Ethics and Code of Practice” (AIATSIS 2017)*

These guidelines are in relation to storage only, and further down the page there are tips for those wishing to preserve their collection of artefacts at home. While these guidelines serve as a way of ensuring cultural protocol is following as well as accessibility and control, they are also a way in which Aboriginal people have been allowed a greater freedom in terms of their own knowledge and history. The AIATSIS website follows the rule of cultural protocol closely, and thus they display a high level of sensitivity towards it. On the first page of the collection of Ann Curthoys diaries, there is a sensitivity disclaimer for Aboriginal people. This might not seem like much, however, the AIATSIS website has another tab that explains this, under donating to a collection. Under this, they discuss how there is no content uploaded without the donators stating what is acceptable for them to do so (AIATSIS 2017).

However, that is not to say that there are no identifiable issues with the online collection of Ann Curthoys diaries. As Crook states in his work (2009);

*“Today the gap between what is available and what can be archived is decreasing. But as our archives and our archiving abilities increase, we are still confronted by new technologies” (Crook, p. 831).*

While it is extremely beneficial to have the diaries of Ann Curthoys digitised and preserved, there is also now the issues of figuring out who has copyright and control over the content. It can be assumed, as Ann Curthoys is now an associate professor, that she donated her diaries to AIATSIS. As there is no notification as to who owns the copyrights on the webpages where the digitised diary entries can be sources, it begs the question as to who really owns them. And as Davis outlines in his work (2010), there have been several changes over the years to ensure that ethical guidelines and protocols are in line with Indigenous rights and accessibility. In terms of the Ann Curthoys diaries, based off previously stated facts in paragraph four, it will be assumed that Curthoys has copyright of the physical copy of the diaries. Whether this is the same for the digital copies is debatable, as if it was AIATSIS that saw this process through, it may belong to them.

It is from here that they are able to allow for the distribution of and access to copies of their digital version of Ann Curthoys diaries. It is through this that the control remains in the hand of AIATSIS, even despite their policies to ensure cultural sensitivities. To go back to the work of Davis (2010), its possible that there are still some flaws within this; as Davis mentions how the guidelines and polices were not reformed until the United Nations released their standards on Indigenous rights and the process of decolonisation. Chenhall, Edmonds, Evans, McQuire & Souza (2016) discuss similar topics in their article. They go on to say that there is;

*“...an ongoing critical need to value Aboriginal/community voice within institutions, placing it at the centre of how cultural heritage collections, including digital collection*

*materials, are represented, contextualised and manage.*” (Chenhall, Edmonds, Evans, McQuire & Souza, p. 14 2016)

In regards to this concept, having Ann Curthoys diaries digitised achieves this goal. As previously mentioned, the resource of her diary on the Freedom Rides has given a personal voice of experience to an important event for both Australian and Aboriginal history. It also further proves to establish that there has been an attempt from AIATSIS to move away from colonial structured archives and resources.

In conclusion, it has been established that digital collections and online platforms play an ever increasing and vital role in providing information and knowledge on Australia’s Aboriginal history. It has also been shown that these technologies play an important role in Aboriginal communities. The significance of the Freedom Rides of nineteen sixty-five was hallmarked as an integral milestone in the push for recognition of Aboriginal People and Aboriginal Affairs. The diaries of Ann Curthoys have become an indispensable piece of evidence in recounting the narrative of the Freedom Rides and what challenges was faced during that era. As such, the online digital collection of her diaries on the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website was a vital step in preserving the information for future generations (AIATSIS 2018). Throughout this essay, the knowledge within these diary entries has be discussed and analysed. Alongside this, the role of technology in providing a safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to tell their stories and experiences has been covered also. Finally, the challenges faced by such a collection such as control, accessibility and ownership has been discussed. Each of these concepts was analysed in accompaniment with other resources.

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