Acceptance Speech – Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres

David Fricker

Your Excellency, Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, Lady Cosgrove, Madame Audrey Azoulay Minister of Culture and Communication, Mr Hervé Lemoine, Director of the Archives of France, Your Excellency Mr Stephen Brady AO CVO Australian Ambassador to France, Monsieur Christophe Lecourtier Ambassador of France to Australia, distinguished guests.

I am delighted to be receiving this award today – with a mix of personal humility but also with some pride as it recognises the important role that Archives perform.

Archives, for me, represent the threads that hold together the fabric of our communities. The records that we preserve and make accessible ensure that the deeds and achievements of all individuals are not forgotten; they ensure that the rights and entitlements of citizens are recognised and respected; they hold the intellectual capital that will fuel our “information economy”; and they are the evidence of government actions that hold our governments and their officials accountable to the people that they serve.

You cannot change the past, but you can change the future — and this is the principal purpose of Archives. To bring the past to the present and enable us to construct the future that we want.

And here I wish to acknowledge my colleague and friend, Mr Hervé Lemoine for his extraordinary leadership in this field in France and internationally. Hervé, your achievements are an inspiration to us all; and it is also particularly pleasing that this occasion is also the launch of our Shared Histories project, a continued collaborative commitment to bring forward the records that celebrate the experiences of history that unite our two nations.

Your Excellencies, Sir Peter and Lady Cosgrove, I am honoured by your presence here because I receive this award as a proud Australian. Please be assured that as Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters I shall be working hard to promote the benefits of documentary heritage for all people, and in every case also to serve Australia and its role within the international community.

Finally, Minister Azoulay I thank you once again and assure you that I will carry this great honour with the dignity and respect that it deserves.

Thank you.