The way in which we view the nature of archives and the role of the archivist has changed significantly in the last few decades. With increasing interest from outside of the profession, the idea of archives as the static, impartial carriers of truth and the archivist as a guardian of records has been questioned.

There have been a number of other changes which have impacted upon the way archivists conceive of themselves and the way in which they work. Chief among these are the rapid rise of technology and the challenges this poses, and the changing place of archives within related fields, such as records and information management.

It is imperative that archivists engage with these challenges if archives are to emerge as a renewed force in the 21st century. This book is designed not as a practical guide to professional practice, but rather as a reader addressing these challenges. The chapters are contributed by leaders in the field, and are grouped around the four core themes (1) defining archives, (2) shaping a discipline, (3) Archives 2.0: archives in society and (4) archives in the information age. The Editor Jennie Alison Hill is a lecturer in archives and records management at the department of information studies, Aberystwyth university. She has previously worked in a wide range of local and national archive services.

Each chapter represents a defined argument in its own right to enable readers to dip in and out of the collection as they wish, and the book is structured to highlight chapters that share a common theme. The content is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? Situating the archive and archivists" by Victoria Lane and Jennie Hill examines archives and archivists in the context of past present and future. It foreshadows many of the themes discussed elsewhere in the book – the growing influence of postmodernism on the profession pervades many of the chapters here, the interconnectedness of creator, user and archivist as well as the need to balance the ‘traditional’ skills with recent developments in digital technology and the place of the archivist within these changes and the growing interest in the notion of archives from outside the discipline. It explores the broad movement within archives from the positivist outlook, which highlighted the impartiality and transparency of the archivist, through more recent reactions to the postmodern turn in archives which has enabled us to challenge this positivist ideology and question the role of archives, archivists, users and creators in new ways, and concludes by looking at the future challenges and directions for archivists.

Chapter 2 "Encounters with the self: archives and research" by Sue Breakell argues that the archivist's function is at once more important than ever and more devolved with users wanting their own control and ownership of their personalised research resources. Archival perspectives and expertise deserve to be better represented in critical debates about the archive and the various manifestations of history in contemporary cultures. The better the archivist can understand the context of the user's interaction with archives, as well as the context of the archives they want to see, the better we can both engage with discussion and accommodate the changing needs of the audiences.

Chapter 3 "Strangely unfamiliar: ideas of the archive from outside the discipline" by Alexandrina Buchanan explores the understanding of the archive in other disciplines, especially those of history, art and literary studies, from the perspective of the archivist. It aims to share an understanding of the current situation and identify possible points of contact and potentials for productive dialogue. Although many archivists may feel estranged by some definitions of 'the archive' found in other disciplines, nevertheless it is hoped that readers may also see parallels.

Chapter 4 "Structural and formal analysis: the contribution of diplomatics to archival appraisal in the digital environment" by Luciana Duranti introduces structural and formal analysis and the area of diplomatics which
was developed as a science for the purpose of determining the authenticity of records of unproven origin. Thus it comprises a body of concepts about the nature of records, their characteristics, components, effects and relationships, and the requirements for their trustworthiness and genuineness, and a methodology for identifying the entity record and assessing its authenticity in any context. Duranti concludes that while we wait for the time to come, we need to continue to develop the science of diplomatics and its methodological tools so that the appraisal of the next complex forms of digital records (e.g. holographic) in the context of the new activities that will use them will not find us unprepared.

Chapter 5 "Archivistics: science or art?" by Eric Ketelaar examines the question of whether archivistics is a science or an art. We find that an archivist may well process archives by employing skill and knowledge, not caring about archival theory. It can be argued that every practitioner starts from hypotheses and ideas. We find the practitioner often accepts these hypotheses straightaway as true and is concerned with the operational side. Yet at some point, they have to address more fundamental questions to prevent archives' management from becoming routine and in order to find answers to changing technologies and challenges.

Chapter 6 "Archons, aliens and angels: power and politics in the archive" by Verne Harris argues that there can be no political power without control of the archive so that democratization - always a process imperfectly realised and always drawing on powers, formations and energies can never fully remove the politics (archon) from the archive (arkheion).

Chapter 7 "Interactivity, flexibility and transparency: social media and Archives 2.0" by Kate Theimer discusses how a common thread that runs through increases in interactivity, flexibility and transparency is a new focus on the users of archives. While not directly caused by the evolution of web technology, this emphasis on the researcher has coincided with the rise of social media tools that also emphasise user participation. Therefore, it is not that surprising that today's archivists are increasingly taking advantage of social media to reach more potential users, share more materials, seek out user contributions and demystify the archival endeavour.

Chapter 8 "The impact of independent and community archives on professional archival thinking and practice" by Andrew Flinn seeks to examine what extent do independent and community archives challenge and transform the theory and practice of archivists. It examines whether 'radical archiving' (even if it applied to all independent and community archives) represent a real radical departure from traditional thinking and practice. In the final analysis, for theory, the chapter concludes with a guarded 'Yes'.

Chapter 9 "The postcustodial archive" by Adrian Cunningham looks at how archives are very different institutions today and archivists think and operate in very different ways. Tensions remain between the legal and accountability role of archives and their social, cultural and historical roles. While there is no reason why these roles should be incompatible, they usually reflect contingent circumstances and often entail differences in orientation, emphasis and language which can lead to misunderstandings. Either way, it is important for archivists to have a clear understanding of the higher purposes than their activities serve.

Chapter 10 "Information management, records management, knowledge management: the place of archives in a digital age" by Nicole Convery highlights the idea of losing parts of our collective memory through technological obsolescence and inadequate digital preservation mechanisms as worrying the archival profession. The focus has shifted from long-term to mid-term preservation requirements due to rapid technological change. It is essential that the archives sector is able to respond to this challenge and continues to increase the proportion of records that are accessible online.

Finally, chapter 11 "Appraisal and the future of archives in the digital era" by Richard J. Cox examines three key areas. First, it characterises how information technologies are transforming our world. Second, a brief case is made for why appraisal is the central and most important archival function. Third, it relates the new digital technologies to archival appraisal making a case for how more rigorous archival appraisal must become, and speculating about the archivist of the future.

This book offers a clearly organised approach to developments in archives and recordkeeping for students following postgraduate training courses in archive administration as well as for archive professionals wishing to refresh and update their understanding of the profession. It is well written and never a chore to read. It is a book that does not have to be read sequentially and I suspect it will find a niche audience that will treasure the contents for many years to come.