



Melanie Fihelly conducts a collection care workshop in the bookstore

Avatar's Abode Trust Archives Annual Report



July 2022 | Archive Committee Convenor's Annual Report 2021-2022

ver 3

Preservation Needs Assessment completed

Lydia Egunnike, formerly Senior Conservator at the State Library of Queensland, completed a comprehensive 140 page preservation needs assessment of the archives in early 2022. This was followed by training for volunteers interested in learning how to preserve collection items. This project was supported with a Sunshine Coast Council Heritage Grant through the Collection Care program.

Eight main recommendations were made following the assessment:

Contents

Page 2	<u>PNA recommendations</u>
Page 3	<u>Environmental Management</u> <u>Disaster Response</u> <u>Collection Care Workshop</u> <u>Baba's house</u>
Page 4	<u>Visitors</u> <u>Recording the stories</u>
Page 5.	<u>Photographic Collection</u>
Page 6.	<u>Collection Care</u>
Page 8	<u>Accessions to the Collection</u>
Page 9	<u>Our volunteers</u> <u>Archive Committee Governance</u> <u>Significance Assessment</u>

PNA Recommendations

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive long term Preservation Plan to encompass prioritised preventive preservation strategies including storage, display and handling guidelines, housekeeping, pest management, and environmental monitoring.
2. As part of the Preservation Plan, refine the existing Integrated Pest Management program to continue and improve methods for monitoring and responding to all biological issues (i.e., pest and fungal activity).
3. Training of volunteers involved with the collection in preventive preservation techniques included in the preservation plan including safe collection handling and use, Integrated Pest Management and object cleaning methods.
4. With the assistance of the recommendations outlined in this report, and as part of the larger Preservation Plan, develop and implement a Collection Storage and Treatment Plan to ensure significant objects and collections are not at risk.
5. Develop and implement an object-based Disaster Preparedness Plan and provide disaster training (including object salvage) for relevant staff on an annual basis. Include floor plan of Collection Store identifying high priority collection items. Shelving housing high priority material can also be marked with moveable magnetic markers for quick retrieval in a disaster scenario.
6. Develop and implement a Digital Preservation Policy to preserve and ensure long term access to digital collection items.
7. Develop and implement a Conservation Management Plan for the long-term preservation of the on-site heritage buildings.
8. Commence a needs assessment to identify specifications and requirements for a new purpose-built Archives building is required.

These recommendations will inform the priorities and Archives Committee over the coming years. Of particular note is the need identified for a purpose-built archive building and an initial proposal has been made to the Trust for the formation of a committee to commence the development of a design brief for a building.

Given the need to preserve the collection for hundreds of years in a wet sub-tropical environment on a site subject to increasing risk of extreme weather events including cyclones, the design of any building requires specialised architectural and engineering skills.



Fire reel and hydrant that the local fire brigade can connect to

PHOTOGRAPHS, AUDIO-VISUAL ITEMS ARTWORK

Recent gift of painting by Ozzie Hall. A good example of why an archival storage facility for artworks is needed and a display space that has a controlled environment.



The same painting hanging in the Hall's residence during a gathering with Betty Hall in 1994

Environmental Management

Additional information to the ongoing recording and controlling of humidity and temperature levels is now being recorded and data is collected at various locations in the archive storage rooms and display cabinets with an ELSEC data logger which also reads and records UV and light levels. This was a recommendation from the Preservation Needs Assessment for which a grant was successfully applied from the Sunshine Coast Council. Monitoring of uv and lux in the library resulted in the installation of uv block out curtains and blinds which will significantly prolong the life of the library book collection, improve the summer temperature in the library, and assist with pest management.

Disaster Response

A small generator has been purchased with Sunshine Coast Council Cultural Heritage grant funding so that humidity can be controlled in archive storage areas during long power outages.

Collection Care Workshop

A workshop on Collection Care, by visiting conservator Melanie Fihelly, and funded through the Sunshine Coast Council Cultural Heritage grants programme, was most informative - and timely - with her wonderful advice and technical expertise in dealing with mould safely (for both the volunteers and for the items and buildings where the mould has been growing.)

During 2022 the unprecedented rains had created a mould problem in Baba's House to an extent which has never occurred previously and presented mighty challenges for anniversary preparations. Melanie's advice during the training workshop and as we worked on the tasks was immensely helpful.

Over the coming year a detailed disaster management plan will be developed.

Baba's House

The discovery of termites in Baba's room during routine cleaning and inspections has emphasized the importance of the careful and thorough IPM (Integrated Pest Management) which has been carried



Display of items from the Cynthia Borg document collection at Spring Sahavas



Elsec 765C data logger for accurate monitoring of environmental conditions



Generator for dehumidifiers in case of prolonged power outage

out meticulously by volunteers with specifically designed traps and by careful vigilance.

The outside of Baba's House has been repainted with consultation between the buildings and maintenance team and archives volunteers, and the termite treatment was arranged with full consideration of archival factors.

The mould situation has created additional challenges: for example, in the care and storage of the collection of Samadhi cloths, and for volunteer workers in Baba's House.

The past year has highlighted the importance of Baba's House as a part of the archives committee responsibility and the complexities of managing this together with other work groups and trust committees. The deterioration of the ceiling inside Baba's Room has been more rapid in the past year and the removal of the insulation above will make ongoing monitoring and maintenance more satisfactory.

Visitors

While we work in the reception building, there are ongoing opportunities for hosting visitors to Avatar's Abode and dealing with inquiries. This is something which works while it happens that one of our volunteers is also from the pilgrim and welcoming group and creates a necessary but regular interruption from archives tasks. In the long term this duplication of roles and purposes is not sustainable or desirable.

Recording the stories

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Since April 2021 there has been a concerted effort to make video recordings of stories from local residents of their journey to Baba, and with particular emphasis, where this was applicable, to their experience of Meher Baba's Mandali. Past Spring Sahavas recordings by Michael Le Page captured many of the experiences of those who met Meher Baba here. It is now time to capture the next generation, those who spent time in Meherabad with the close disciples, to share for future generations their stories. Jeanette Young is coordinating the candidates for this project, and for many the recordings will remain private. The decision is



Conservator Michael Morendy inspects a tapestry.



Regular cleaning and monitoring of the crawl space between the timber walls of Baba's Room and the outer walls of Baba's house to assist with pest control and mould prevention.

with the person being recorded. Over 24 people have been recorded over the past year.

Transcription of these stories in the future will ensure long term preservation of the contents.

Some of these oral history videos can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/michaellepage1894/videos>

AUDIO DIGITISATION PROJECT

A major digitisation project has commenced with generous financial support from a Sunshine Coast Council Heritage Grant. A small team of volunteers is being trained to digitize more than 850 audio cassette tapes which provide an irreplaceable record of the last 60 years at Avatar's Abode and in India.



Sound engineer Steve Summers prepares for a digitization session in the library

Photographic Collection

In March 2022, after more than 10 years of work, Gusi Carpenter completed the rehousing, scanning and cataloguing of over 3000 photographs in the collection. Catalogued into a special database (Portfolio) this unique collection records the history of the development of Avatar's Abode as well as hundreds of photographs brought back from India by Francis Brabazon and other pilgrims in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

The extensive cataloguing makes it possible to identify photos with specific content (e.g people, places, dates) and these images can then be used for publications and in audio visual presentations.

Gusi spent the last 15 years working on the Avatar Meher Baba Trust collection in India comprising over 15,000 photos. Her devoted commitment to this work leaves a lasting legacy for Baba lovers in Australia.



Ananda inspecting and cleaning original photograph given by Baba



John Parry telling his story



Video recording a story in Baba's House

Collection Care

ARTEFACTS AND RELICS

The artefacts and relics collection has been added to by several donations and recent bequests. Each arrival involves several tasks, including careful attempts to quarantine new items while a pest check is done, freezing where appropriate or necessary, (determined sometimes in consultation with conservator expert advisors) sorting, labelling, registering, photographing, measuring, documenting condition descriptions, recording provenance or stories where these are known or discoverable, or researching possible sources of additional information where they are not provided. (For example, when an unsigned pencil drawing of Baba was found inside a donated book, and various people have been contacted in search of the artist, given that this item arrived in a bequest from a deceased estate). After all this begins the process of rehousing items into suitable long term storage, either singularly or in suitable storage groups (for example paper items/correspondence/documents, photographs/albums, publications, textiles, ephemera, and other items such as stone, wood and flower remnants).

Ongoing addition to records for existing artefacts continues, with the slow process of adding photographic records of condition and updating reports.

The PNA has significantly added to our understanding of what is required to ensure long term preservation of collection items and raised the bar for our documentation and storage policies and practices.

A private visit to Avatar's Abode by Ted and Janet Judson led to a couple of sessions at Archives with Janet, and to a discussion recorded with Ted in which he described for us the process of developing the design brief for the archives building at Meherabad. The design of the MeM commenced during Mehera's life and concluded with the official opening in 2002. We are fortunate to have people around Avatar's Abode who have worked directly under the people who learned their skills in care of treasures and buildings directly from Meher Baba's Mandali.



Baba's Room cleaning after the big mouldy wet



Suzi Iimura and Janet Judson working on Mehera's techniques for preparing Baba's hair for display



Raine sorting Being is Dying by Loving with Francis Brabazon's handwritten notes

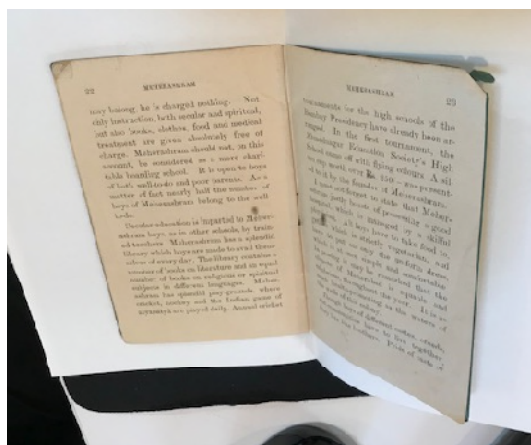
Exhibiting the Collection

During the Spring Sahavas a selection from the Cynthia Borg -Mani Irani correspondence collection was displayed in Baba's House to accompany a talk and PowerPoint presentation, along with a display and presentation of " the lunchbox contents" which were discovered during cleaning of Francis's room prior to the 2021 anniversary and accessioned later, (and included a hitherto unnoticed pale hair, which is presumed to have been left in its packet when the clump was taken out for display, and a small note which confirmed provenance of the pink piece of cloth associated with Meher Baba's body lying in the crypt in 1969.)

In November 2021, during a regular bus tour organized by the Sunshine Coast Cultural Heritage team, we responded to an invitation with a slideshow presentation at Bankfoot House to illustrate the story of our installation of the museum quality archive display cabinets into Baba's House, which was funded by a programme administered by that team.

During the 2022 anniversary a display was prepared to accompany a presentation about the manuscript "Life in a Hut", an account of Baba's Life in 1922, and the first booklet about Meher Baba published in English, by KJ Dastur, which is thought to be the only traceable copy, and held in the Jim Migdoll Collection in our archives.

In December 2021 a Sunshine Coast Council deputation of a grants officer and member from the Cultural Heritage team visited. They responded with great enthusiasm and commended our team on the dedication and love with which we work.



First publication in English about Meher baba – 1928 – Very rare first edition.

Accessions to the Collection

During the past year there have been several significant donations/bequeaths and acquisitions including:

Anthony Thorpe correspondence from NZ collection, courtesy of Jill Hobbs

Car seats from the car in which Meher Baba was driven to Avatar's Abode are now in storage,

Additional documents and items from the estate of May Lundquist which are being rehoused and catalogued

Various books, letters, and artefacts from the Bruford family collection.

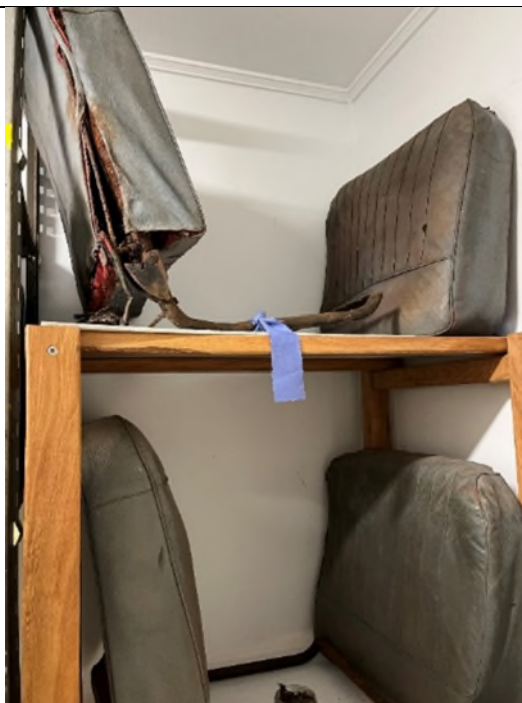
Microfilm found which contained rare photographic records of documents on microfilm scanned at Adi's instructions in 1973 in India, estimated to contain over 7,500 documents, and this is the only known extant copy.

Posters from Roy and Ros Hayes, and Leigh Rowan, which form the basis of a story from the 1960s and early 1970s which included responses from Meher Baba during His lifetime.

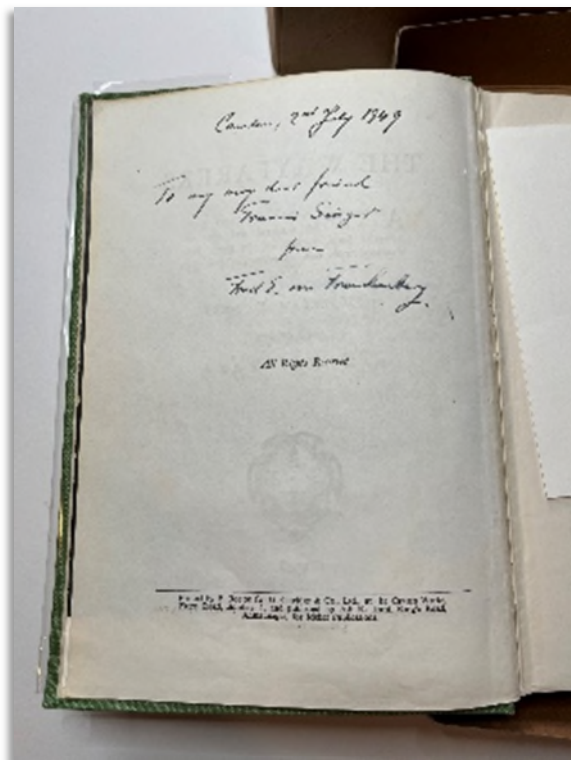
Cynthia Borg sent a large collection which included early correspondence from her parents' collections and added to what she had previously shared of her personal correspondence with the Mandali. She also delivered into the care of archives several precious artefacts and relics, books, photographs, and memorabilia from a long period of her family's association with the early Sufi group and then Meher Baba and His Mandali.

A persistent search by a Baba lover led to the delivery also of three paintings by Ozzie Hall and a small collection of his writings and correspondence which had been in the safe custody of a niece of Ozzie and Betty Hall.

Michael Le Page brought back from his US visit in April items which he carried on behalf of the donors, including a copy of "The Wayfarers" signed to Francis by the Baron von Frankenberg, and letters from Francis Brabazon to Jim Meyer.



Car seats from Baba's trip to Avatar's Abode



Inscription to Francis from Baron von Frankenberg in "the Wayfarers" copy, gifted by Philip Creager

Our Volunteers

Working with the archives collection is an enormous privilege and the fragrance of Baba's visit to and connection with Avatar's Abode is often present as we work together.

During the past year we have firmed our connections with the NZ and Meher House archives representatives, Jill Hobbs, and Jennifer Keating while collaborating on aspects of our Collection Management policy.

There has been wonderful support from the Meher Archives Collective and Meher Center for our grant applications and in communicating between team members, which we hope will continue and strengthen in the future

While we have had a couple of sad losses from our team, we welcome new input and old friends in new roles. The archives continue to provide a wonderful opportunity for Baba lover volunteers to work together cooperatively on the loving care, preservation, display and sharing of the collection. Dedicated volunteers who commit hundreds of hours per year to this work have created a collegial atmosphere where we find many opportunities to deepen our connection to the Beloved.

Our continuing goal is that the work being undertaken will ensure future generations will have the opportunity to savour the sweet presence of Beloved Baba at Avatar's Abode.

The ongoing support for the archives by the Avatar's Abode Trust Directors and the Board overall is much appreciated.

Jeanette Young

Archives Committee Convenor

His things are the tangible things that keep His presence alive in our hearts by helping us remember Him. Every little thing keeps His Presence fresh in our hearts.

These little things make the Unapproachable approachable.

Eruch Jessawala

Archive Committee Governance

Sue Douglas joined the committee this year. She brings a wealth of experience in diverse fields including law and community boards. The committee meets quarterly and includes Jaya Foley (Director), Sue Jamison (Director), Sim Symons, Kay Walker, David Bowling (Convenor), Jeannette Young and Francis Thompson. A major policy development was the approval of a Collection Management Policy by the Trust in May. This provides an important policy framework for all key areas of collection management.

Significance Assessment

In June Ray Kerkhove commenced a long overdue collection significance assessment. We expect this will confirm the significance of our collection in relation to Sunshine Coast heritage, identify items of state and national significance and also establish the importance of our collection internationally.



Sue Douglas watermarking photos before uploading images to Zenfolio