

## **On the record:**

**2013 Sir Rupert  
Hamer Award case  
studies**



# **Community benefits from digital rate books in Box Hill**



With the support and encouragement of Public Record Office Victoria, the Box Hill Historical Society has managed to plug a gap in its data and acquire new skills which will contribute to the success of projects in the future. The project to preserve a crucial part of Whitehorse history has seen the Box Hill Historical Society snare a significant accolade. The group won the community archives category at the Sir Rupert Hamer Records Management Awards for their work on digitising City of Box Hill rate books.

## **The Category: Places of Deposit (Community Archives)**

### **About Box Hill Historical Society:**

The Box Hill Historical Society Inc was formed in 1963 by a group of local residents keen to preserve the heritage of the Melbourne suburb. Since the beginning of the society, the group has enjoyed the support of the local council and has developed significant holdings of photographs and manuscripts with local interest and value.

### **The Challenge:**

The Box Hill Historical Society wanted to make a complete sequence of the City of Box Hill rate books available to the local community. A partial copy of the series of rate books was already held by the society, but the years between 1937 and 1946 were missing.

The society also wanted to acquire digitisation skills and knowledge to use for future digitisation projects. The group of passionate volunteers faced a steep learning curve to be able to digitise images and then apply these skills to complete the digitised set of City of Box Hill Rate Books held by the society.

## **The Solution:**

To achieve its aims, the society approached the Public Record Office Victoria. After discussion and clarification of roles and responsibilities, it was agreed (subject to a pilot) that the society would provide volunteers to do the hands-on digitisation and Public Record Office Victoria would provide the facilities and access to the relevant rate books.

Box Hill Historical Society spokeswoman Robyn Doble said, “a team of five spent countless hours scanning about 23,000 images from rate books from the 1930s and 1940s that were missing from their archives”.

The rate books are a valuable resource for people interested in family history or the significance of a building.

## **Approach:**

The digitisation project began in December 2010 and was completed in March 2012.

The rate books were digitised by five volunteers who worked at Public Record Office Victoria one day a week at a minimum of 6 hours a day, for 14 weeks.

The process took approximately 300 person-hours and Daniel Wilksch, the coordinator of digital projects at Public Record Office Victoria, provided support and encouragement to the volunteers throughout the project.

The images were then transformed into a format that could be easily accessed and copied onto a hard drive supplied by the Box Hill Historical Society.

## **The Result:**

The society now holds the images on the hard drives in their local history room which is open to the public one day a week. There is now a complete set of rate books, in a variety of formats, dating from their inception in 1863, to the mid 1980s.

Additionally, society members acquired digitisation skills that can be utilised on future projects.

## **Key Discoveries:**

- In undertaking the digitisation process, careful consideration to the unique requirements of the project is required. Volunteers need to ensure that when working at Public Record Office Victoria, the digital camera and computer are adjusted to the projects requirements.

## **Benefits of Entering:**

Aside from enjoying the prestige of winning the award, the society has, through the process, acquired skills which can be applied to projects in the future.

As the society was the first local history group in Victoria to enter into a digitisation project with Public Record Office Victoria, its success could encourage other local history groups to identify a manageable project to undertake.