

## Book review: Records and information management

Reviewed by: **Sarah Henning**

Museum Archivist and Information Governance Manager, Imperial War Museum

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Franks, Patricia C. (2025) *Records and information management*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Chicago: ALA Neil Schuman; London: Facet Publishing. ISBN 979-8-89255-588-3 (paperback, ALA); ISBN 978-1-78330-818-7 (paperback, Facet)

**CONTACT** Sarah Henning  SHenning@iwm.org.uk  Imperial War Museum

Records Management is one of those things that most people take for granted. There is a general assumption in organisations that it just happens, and that the digital world has made things easier. After all, why bother with all that organisation when you can keep everything and do a free text search?

This book explains why. It provides a clear picture of the endless amount of systems, requirements and developments that records managers have to be on top of and it leaves you wondering about whether anyone manages to do it all.

As the introduction says, it isn't intended to be a cover to cover read, unless you're a student, and is more of a reference work. Its aim is to 'provide stability in a world that gets overly excited about the next new thing'. And Chapter 1 gives you a potted history of when each 'next new thing' came along. It took 5,867 years to go from using tokens for accounting to the invention of the manual typewriter, but only 50 to go from the invention of the PC to the widespread use of AI. As a records manager I envy my Victorian counterparts for the simplicity of their jobs, but not enough to go back to poor sanitation, no NHS and having to stay at home and do the housework.

Starting with the basics, the layout is good with a clear chapter structure. Each chapter has an introduction, central text and a summary, following the tried and tested 'say what you are going to say, say it and then say what you have said' formula. Text is split up into clear, headed sections, and there are a lot of illustrations and diagrams – really welcome with so dense a subject. What I particularly liked was the 'Paradigms and Perspectives' section at the end of each chapter, where guest authors give their own take on the topic discussed in the chapter. These are often very practical and reassuring after all the theory.

The book is comprehensive, with chapters on all the usual subjects, including creation, retention, classification, emerging technologies, physical record centres and archives. It is particularly strong on definitions and descriptions of software, tools and processes, and doesn't shy away from stating the obvious, something often overlooked when it comes to technology. Records managers have to be able to ask the obvious questions about how technology works to make sure it does the right things by the information it processes. This book provides the background to give records managers the confidence to ask those questions – experience shows you can't assume anything with technology.

Patricia Franks is writing from an American perspective and for a largely American audience and the contrast with records management in the UK is striking. It is a long time since I trained to be a records manager, but the approach here doesn't seem to have changed much – records management is still very much second best to its more exciting archive sister. It is also not taken nearly as seriously by governments and institutions, unless something goes wrong. Compare the government legislation on public records in the UK, mainly covered by two Public Record Acts and a smattering of subsequent legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, with the significantly larger amount of legislation, directives and standards produced in the US and cited by Franks in this book. There is also a refreshing assumption that resources, time and support will be freely available as everyone realises what you are doing is important. Where they are not, Chapter 14, focusing on leadership and management skills, might help.

The US focus means that if you want to know about key legislation in the UK that affects records management, such as Data Protection legislation or the Freedom of Information Act, these are just briefly referred to. But if Franks were to cover every piece of legislation worldwide, this would be a very long book indeed.

Sometimes, the book can feel like an exhausting list of things to do. In a world where technology advances so quickly, records and information managers find it hard to keep up. Having a grasp of the basics, and what you can and can't compromise on, is crucial for those struggling with resource and the relentless focus on the next shiny thing. The end of chapter essays help with this, and Chapter 13 brings everything neatly together with advice on how to develop a records management programme and information governance strategy.

If I'm being really picky, the section on archives isn't as strong as the other chapters but this doesn't claim to be an archive textbook. There is also more of a focus on the commercial value of information rather than its value as evidence in other ways. However, this may not be a bad thing as emphasising how information can make and save you money is usually the main driver for managing it properly.

It is sobering to realise that despite the greater focus on laws and standards that there seems to be in the US, records remain very vulnerable if the people in charge don't care. Records management is undervalued but crucial for good governance and we need better training and the guidance that books like this provide.