

ARCHIVES CLASSIFICATION IN TASMANIA

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This article is intended as a sequel to the one I wrote for the predecessor of this Journal and published early in 1955, called "Accessions Procedure in Tasmania". The processes discussed below follow naturally from those described in that article, which outlined Tasmanian practices in dealing with records from the time of their transfer to archival custody up to the point when they were shelved in accession order, and concluded with the drawing up of our form TSA 3 (the Accession Record of a transfer) and with the making of the "series card"; this card described in summary form the records comprised in any one series revealed during the accession process, and was made in anticipation of the time when a comprehensive classification system, based on the record group and using the series as a unit of description, would be introduced.

Since that time seven record groups in the Tasmanian State Archives have been classified, and most Australian archivists will have seen examples of our form TSA 6, the Record Group Inventory based on this classification.

A record group is not necessarily the same as an archive group, taking the latter to mean all the records of an agency and its legitimate predecessors; for example, the present day Tasmanian Chief Secretary's and Premier's Department is the legitimate successor of the old Colonial Secretary's Office, having evolved through the Chief Secretary's Department and with the addition of the Premier's Office. This is therefore an archive group, and its records could be classified as one; but for convenience, it has been divided into three fairly clearly defined record groups: the Colonial Secretary's Office (c. 1824-1855); the Chief Secretary's Department (1856-1946); and the Chief Secretary's and Premier's Department (1947 -). The Premier's Department, having begun as a separate administration, is treated separately until the amalgamation in 1947. Classification is not attempted for any record group until we are reasonably satisfied that it is as complete to date as it is possible to make it. As in the previous article, I shall take the record group of the Lands and Surveys Department to illustrate the classification process. The records of this department, having reached us in three separate transfers over a period of about two years, are a good example of the way classification corrects the inevitable anomalies created by the accession process, and the need to use, in the absence of any other, the order resulting from this preliminary treatment. Being listed and shelved in accession order, not only were the records comprised in each transfer physically removed from one another, but often the various items of any given series, having arrived in different transfers, were separated. Classification aims, among other things, to correct this situation by creating a new order for the items and series of a record group, and by bringing it together as a coherent and logically arranged whole.

The first step is to have all the series of a record group, as

identified on the TSA 3s, entered on cards, including such details as record group, series number, number of items, running feet and accession numbers (see Appendix). Then the cards, performing the function of the Commonwealth's Series Identification Sheets, are shuffled to bring the series into some logical relationship with one another. Certain principles have been established for this arrangement, but there are often many ad hoc decisions to be made, because of the extremely varied nature of the series in most record groups. However, general correspondence is always placed first, followed by the appropriate registers and then the indexes. Then come more specialised types of correspondence, such as letterbooks general, letterbooks devoted to particular subjects, and letterbooks of letters to particular individuals. In the case of the Lands and Surveys Department, form records (applications to purchase and lease land) have been placed next, followed by their respective registers and indexes. Proceeding always from the general to the particular, the more miscellaneous sub-groups follow; their order is more difficult to determine, but considerations of size, importance, chronology and miscellaneousness all play a part. It must be admitted that the more scrappy and diverse the series become, the more arbitrary becomes the decision as to their order. Towards the tail-end of a record group or sub-group, single items (volumes, bundles, etc.) often form distinct series in themselves; but obvious precedences, such as that of head office over branch office, of fair copy over draft, have of course been respected.

The difficulty of deciding on the order of the more miscellaneous series, and their multiplicity in most record groups involving older records, have decided^{us} not to carry classification to the length of giving sub-groups (e.g. letterbooks) any definite status within the record group, by assigning them a separate number; the TSA 6s are, however, in effect divided up into sub-groups, though no indication is made as to where one ends and the next begins.

The record group is now assigned a letter-symbol (in the case of our example LSD), and this forms the first element in the classification symbol of any item within a series. Next the cards, sorted into the order which has been decided upon as reasonably logical, are numbered from 1 onwards; this is the series number, and the second element of an item's symbol. Finally the items themselves receive numbers, within their series, from 1 onwards. For example, the second item (volume) of the twenty-fourth series of the Lands and Surveys Department record group ("Surveyor-General's letterbook of letters to the Colonial Secretary, Sep 1829 - Jul 1857") would receive the symbol LSD 24/2. The identification could, if need be, be carried further to any given document within the item; thus LSD 24/2/257 would mean page 257 of the example quoted.

Intercalation of series or items found subsequently to classification is possible, as shown in the following example: say a series were subsequently found which should be placed between the series LSD 106 and LSD 107: it would be known as LSD 106/1. Again, say the seventy-sixth item of series LSD 16/1-194 were found; it would be shelved in its rightful place and

classified LSD 16/75/1. Thus later disturbance of classification need not be feared when one is not sure (and one seldom is) of the completeness of the record group.

Having theoretically brought together the series and items of a record group from, perhaps, as many as four or five separate transfers, the classification symbols are entered against the appropriate items in the final column of the accession register (see the previous article). In this way the accession register provides a convenient key-list, equating accession numbers with classification symbols; the original, and more basic, means of identification is therefore not lost in creating a new order for the records. The items themselves are now labelled, and shelved in the order of their new classification. The next step is to draw up the TSA 6 (see Appendix) which is the final list of the series of a record group, classified, described, measured, identified by accession number, and provided with a column for the departmental determination of access, should this not have been done already at the TSA 3 stage. The list is then sent to the transferring department to supersede previous TSA 3s, and to provide them with a ready guide to all those of their records held in archival custody.

The TSA 6 is also a useful internal control. Because of shelving shortages, it has not yet been possible in Tasmania always to shelve records in their new classified order; but the precise measurements which are made, both linear and vertical, while the classification process is going on, enable us to plan accurately in advance the most economical disposition of the steel shelving, so that both ordering and final shelving are simplified. The usefulness of the form as an interim summary guide is obvious.

The TSA 6 is also the basis for the Tasmanian contribution to the proposed Guide to pre-Federation records. The series having been identified to our satisfaction, it remains (and this is by no means a simple task) to add the descriptive paragraph to elucidate its nature and usefulness, according to the rules decided on by a sub-committee of the Canberra seminar of July, 1954. As mentioned in the former article, the principle of having all records in custody brought, as far as possible, to the same level of treatment at any one time, is again being followed at this classification stage, as far as circumstances allow. Therefore it is intended to have all record groups of reasonable completeness classified before the next stage of more detailed description is embarked upon. This of course does not mean that we are not ready to co-operate with the Commonwealth and the other States to describe any one record group in the detail required for a Guide when called upon.

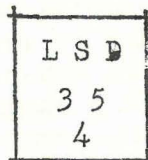
One or two final points remain for discussion.

If the title of a department should change during the period covered by a record group, the last-used name is adopted for the whole record group; but previous names are retained for the items to which they apply. Thus,

the present title, "Lands and Surveys Department", is used for the record group as a whole, but the accession slips (See Appendix of previous article) still retain the former title of "Survey Department" for those items falling within the period during which the name was current.

Sections, divisions, standing committees and so on are, if their records are controlled by distinct registries, treated separately from the parent department, and their records are listed at the end of the record group, but using the same sequence of series numbers.

To conclude with a practical point, which may be of some interest to archivists in other States. The classification symbol is written on the item by the following means: a solution of petrol and the black rubber compound known as "PC 49" is applied to the spine of the volume (or the edge of the box, bundle, etc.) with a stiff brush through a template, leaving a black rectangle of about 1" x $\frac{1}{2}$ ". This gives a good surface for white ink, on which the symbol is written with an ordinary pen, thus



APPENDIX

Series card

LANDS AND SURVEYS DEPARTMENT	
Surveyor-General's general letterbooks.	
2 Feb 1828-17 Apr 1890, 5 May-23 Nov 1893, 11 May 1895-19 Sep 1923, 7 Nov 1924-17 June 1925.	
Record Group: LSD	Accession Nos:
Series: 16	25/2215-22 54/4332-517
Vols: 1 - 194	
Running feet: 49'6"	

Form TSA 6

TASMANIAN STATE ARCHIVES
RECORD GROUP INVENTORY

Record Group

Page

Classific- ation symbol	Description of Series	Inclusive dates	Running feet	Access- ion nos.	Access