

On him is the onus of seeing that they are properly housed, preserved, and calendared or catalogued. If he be in charge of an institution to which the public has a right of access, he has a further duty to make the records accessible to students and to the public generally, under suitable arrangements for safeguarding them. The archivist is not appointed to extract his records for the sole purpose of writing historical monographs based upon their study. It is, therefore, not essential that he should be an historian. A good knowledge of history, national and local, and particularly administrative, is a valuable qualification, but a history degree, coupled with a 'love for ancient papers', does not make an archivist. In addition to his particular routine duties, it is his further interest to promote, in every way he can, the preservation of archives generally".

That, I submit, is enough for any one person.

F.H. Rogers,

University of New England.

THE ARRANGEMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF PRIVATE PAPERS

Suggestions for field workers listing private papers in Australia with a view to the compilation of a central register.

At the Library Association's Conference held in Brisbane in August 1955, the Committee of the Archives Section appointed a sub-committee to outline principles of arrangement and description for private papers in this country.

The committee was anxious to provide guidance for the research workers, historians and librarians who might have the opportunity of surveying such papers.

Detailed examination and description such as is suggested here may not always be possible, but it is hoped that the procedure outlined will lead to standardisation of description and arrangement.

Such standardisation will help research workers using the descriptive lists. It will also facilitate the central recording and indexing of information about such material.

The term 'private papers' is here used to include the papers of a person, family, business firm, station, society or institution. Occasionally records of Government Departments are found amongst such papers.

Private papers may be in the possession of the original owners or their descendants, they may have become part of the holdings of a library or archival institution, or they may be in the possession of a private collector.

Examination and arrangement of the material

The person undertaking the survey should first of all make himself familiar with the history of the person, family, institution, etc. whose papers he is about to list. This knowledge will help him to a general view of the collection and also to place and assess the material, especially if the collection is large.

The papers of commercial concerns, associations and institutions usually fall into groups such as Minute Books, Account Books, Letter-books and bundles of letters received or legal documents. Such groups are easily recognised and described.

Occasionally with these records, and almost invariably with family papers, there will be trunks, baskets, drawers and other containers full of loose papers. Time to examine these in detail may be wanting and in this case a general description and overall measurements should be given. When time permits, a more thorough examination should be made.

This examination must be done with great care. It may never be possible to re-unite two items one of which has no meaning on its own, for example a memo indicating the action taken on the letter it accompanies. Again, miscellaneous notes variously dated and of no interest in themselves may gather importance as components of a certain file or as evidence of information available to the writer of a certain political speech.

The object of this careful examination is to find out first of all what the papers are, and also to discover their original arrangement, that is, the order which existed when they were in use, or failing that, some other arrangement given them by a later owner for a particular reason. It is advisable to go through all the papers before deciding what this arrangement might have been.

This original order should, with the owner's consent, be restored.

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If no previous arrangement can be found, a small collection of loose papers of the same kind is usually sorted into chronological order since this order best illustrates the history of the person, firm, family, etc., concerned. There are cases, however, when another arrangement is preferable. For instance, the editor of a literary journal may have received a great number of letters which have not been kept in any order. It may here be best to group these letters by the writers rather than by date, since there may be a certain continuity in the subjects written about by the correspondents. In other cases groupings, such as business letters, family letters, or papers on individual subjects, may be decided upon as items naturally fall into certain categories. These are matters for the person making the survey to decide, using his own judgment and knowledge of the family or institution concerned and its history. The papers of families may be divided into groups according to the members of the family, but here again it is best for the person doing the survey to use his own judgment. A particular member of the family may have historical importance which may justify all his papers, for example, letters written by him to other members of the family, being considered as a separate group.

A useful working method when examining the collection is to letter brief descriptions on wide slips of paper of uniform size which can be placed jutting out of a folded document or temporarily clipped to it. Such a specimen slip would read

LETTER BOOK	or	MINUTES	or	SMITH, John
Jan. 1843 - Dec. 1845		GENERAL		Letters received
		1920-5		1860

or again if it is difficult to get a general picture of the collection and very detailed listing seems necessary

LETTER		LETTER
John Hanbrook		Walter Smith to
to Wm Manson	or	Wm. Manson
1843 July 4		1843 Dec. 10
plans for wool		family matters
mill in Sydney		

The advantage of working in this way is that when all the documents have been examined they can be quickly grouped according to whatever arrangement is decided upon. In the last example above, possible arrangements might be Letters received by W. Manson; or, Business letters received by W. Manson and Family letters received by W. Manson; or, Letters received by W. Manson and other members of the Manson firm from John Hanbrook.

Whatever steps are taken for the final arrangement of the collection and its list, the slips can be used to compile the list. Should the owner not agree to the documents being re-arranged, a note should be made that the order given in the list is not that of the papers.

In most collections of private papers items will be found which appear to have no direct connection with rest of the papers. For instance, there may be pamphlets on specific subjects which may have interested a member or members of a family or institution or business firm at one time or another. If perusal of the rest of the collection gives no clue as to the connection of such an item with it, the item should be considered as part of the family's or firm's library and hence omitted from the survey. Exception will be made should such items be annotated as the notes may throw light on the views of the person making them or on the subject with which it deals. Many printed documents found in the papers of business firms and bodies, for example, balance sheets and annual reports, are office copies and should be described with the papers and kept with them.

The descriptive list

From the slips which have been made out for each item or group of items in the collection, the final descriptive list can be drawn up.

The aim should be to set out clearly and precisely a list which will contain the data relevant to each item or group. It is neither necessary nor advisable to give a detailed description of every item or group, for instance a bundle of purely personal letters containing no material of other than family interest can simply be described as Smith, William, Adelaide. - Letters to his father and mother and his brothers in Melbourne, 1864-78, 1 bundle; or a group of letters received in the course of business can be described as Turner, William, Paper Mills, Waterloo - Letters received, 1850-74. 3 (4" foolscap) boxes.

The person making the survey should try to view the material from all possible angles so that the information embodied in the final list can be of assistance to research workers in all fields. In particular, it is important to note dates, subject covered, and significant single items such as explorers' diaries, or eye witness accounts of events. It is better to err on the side of over-description than otherwise.

It should be kept in mind that the index to the register will be centrally compiled by people who cannot refer to the papers and that the description must include enough information for this to be possible, and so that it can be of use to those consulting it. For instance, the date of a letter relating the writer's discovery of gold is of vital importance.

When describing groups of items, the number of separate items or the measurements in running feet with indication of minimum and maximum height should be specified, thus Minute Books, 1843-54. 6 vols; Carstairs, John, Melbourne - Letters to his father, 1870-1. 35 letters in 1 bundle. Manson, William, Sydney - Letters received, 1840-74. 12 feet, 10" high.

A physical description need only be given if relevant, e.g. Minute Books need no further description. Letter-books may be long-hand copies, press copies or carbon copies, but in most cases the description Letter-book is sufficient. Most of the material will be original material and it is not necessary to state this, but it is necessary to state that an item is printed or is a copy, as also whether the copy is contemporary, manuscript, typescript, photographic, or certified. A note should be made of the location of the original if known. Such an entry might read Flinders, Matthew - Journal on the Investigator, 1801-3. 3 vols. Vol. 3 is a photographic copy of the original in the P.R.O., Lond.

An explanatory biographical or other note may be added to give significance to the entry. This applies particularly to little known persons, for example in the case of letters written by Frank Bailey from Queensland to his father in England, 1866-75, it should be noted that Bailey was a tutor on Rosewood Station.

If there are any drawings, plans or other illustrations of any importance in letters, journals or diaries, this should be noted in the description.

If possible a note should be made of any family portraits, or portraits of people connected with the business or institution (photographs, engravings, paintings) which are still in existence. When possible the artist's name should be given. Albums of sketches and old photograph albums should be listed. In the case of sketches of places and photographs of people where no note of the subject appears, inquiries should be made from the family and the data recorded as far as possible. Any such note should give the source of the information and should be initialled by the person making the survey if noted also on the material itself.

The description should also include a note of the existence of any index or calendar and should indicate whether any part of the material has been published.

After the list has been drawn up from the slips, an additional note should be added giving the present ownership of the papers; conditions of access, if access is given; the state of repair of the documents or books concerned; and any other particulars which could be of use to those compiling the central register or to research workers who may use the papers.

The name and status of the person making the survey and the date of it should be given.

If the owners have indicated an intention to present the papers to a library or other institution, a note of this should be made. If it seems tactful to do so, enquiry might be made regarding the fate of the papers, since this can sometimes lead to provision being made for papers to be lodged in a suitable institution. In too many cases, collections of papers, especially family papers, are lost through lack of interest on the part of the owners or their heirs.

Form of descriptive lists.

At least two copies of the lists should be prepared, one for the owner and one for the central recording point.

A new sheet should be used for the descriptive list of each new collection so that all the lists can be interfiled at a central point.

So that uniformity can be attained at this central point without laborious editing the following style should be used:

Heading

The descriptive list of a collection should be headed with the name in capitals of the family, firm, institution, etc., whose papers are being listed. If a second sheet is necessary, it should have the same heading as the first and be marked p. 2.

Title

In describing single items when the title used is quoted exactly from the item itself, either from the title page, the heading at beginning of text or (when a volume) from spine or cover, it should be enclosed within single quotation marks, e.g. Leichhardt, Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig - 'Log of my journey from Port Stephens to Peak Range'. Should the title on the spine or cover differ widely from the contents of the volume, a note to that effect should be made. The term 'records' is usually used for corporate bodies, 'papers' for persons and families, 'correspondence' when copies or drafts of answers are filed with letters received 'letters received' and 'letter-books' as required.

Dates

The following style is suggested:

1840-5 1841-52 1 May 1841 - 10 Jan. 1842
3 Jan. - 7 Mar. 1856

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As an abbreviation for the months the first three letters might be used. June should be written in full.

Size

It will rarely be necessary to give the height of the individual volume, if there are a great many volumes or bundles the minimum and maximum height and the number of running feet should be given. All measurements should be given in inches and feet.

Pages.

This also will be given in rare cases only. When given use the abbreviation pp. if the volume is paged (i.e. a number allocated to the recto and verso of each leaf), ff. if foliated (i.e. one number only allocated to both verso and recto). In the singular use p., f..

Abbreviations

MS. MSS. Manuscript, manuscripts vol. vols. volume, volumes

Contents

Whenever possible the description of the contents should be itemised for quick reference.

(Comment on this paper would be appreciated)

EXAMPLES