

FINDING AIDS FOR THE MICROFILM COPIES OF AUSTRALIAN
RECORDS IN THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

A paper read at the 11th Conference of the
Library Association of Australia, Melbourne, August 1961.

M. Lukis and M. Medcalf

(J.S. Battye Library of W.A. History)

No doubt in each State since consignments of microfilm copies of the Australian material in the Public Record Office began to arrive, members of staff in the various libraries have been concerned with the problem of making the information contained on these reels of film easily available to their readers.

It has been suggested that our aim should be to produce a complete index, reel by reel, for the microfilmed records, but there are two objections to this. It is far too time-consuming a project, and it is doubtful if any of the libraries would have sufficient staff to undertake it, or at least to carry it out in a reasonable length of time. The second and more serious objection is that an index alone, though useful as a lead to a specific document or fact, would not enable the best use to be made of the records. An alternative suggestion has been made that a list, reel by reel, indicating what is on each, is all that should be necessary. Although the compilation of such a basic list is probably inevitable, there is the same objection to working from this alone without a background of knowledge of the material itself; we feel too that the information contained in such a list could be re-organised to be much more effective as a finding aid.

The two main points which we are going to try to make in this paper are therefore that it is necessary:-

1. To provide a general guide to the material itself as a background to any specific finding aids.
2. To overcome the problems which arise in compiling finding aids for records on microfilm, and the particular problems resulting from the fact that nothing has been incorporated in the films themselves to lessen this difficulty.

With regard to the first point, we do believe that the research worker should be provided with a guide which will give a general introduction to the material itself; he does need to understand the records he is using and know something of the history and functions of the office which produced them.

It might be argued that such an introduction is not really necessary: that sufficient background information is obtainable from Galbraith, Giuseppi, the Printed Lists and Indexes etc. etc.; that

most scholars are familiar with the Public Record Office and its holdings; that as far as Colonial Office records are concerned both staff and readers, knowing the Governor's Office records for their own State, should have no difficulty in using their counterpart.

This may all to some extent be true, but the fact remains that just as the various guides to American material in the P.R.O. have been found invaluable by scholars in the U.S.A. (and are still being produced, giving even greater detail, e.g. the excellent work entitled The British Public Record Office, published by the Library Board of Virginia in 1960), so a similar guide to Australian records, with specific reference to the microfilmed series, would be a great asset here. Not only would it be of assistance to scholars, but it would serve a double purpose by stimulating interest and introducing the records to a much wider public. The Joint Copying Project has involved Australian libraries in a large outlay. The copies obtained as a result of this should not be regarded as the preserve of the professional historians, but should be used by all those who like to delve into Australian history.

It is not necessary at the moment to discuss at any length the form and content of the first part of such a guide, serving as an introduction to the records copied. It can be assumed that it would contain a brief note on the Public Record Office, deal with the groups containing Australian material, and describe in greater detail the relevant classes within the groups. Finally with regard to these classes, it should contain, in addition to general information about their range and content, an analysis of the filing system used, with details of indexes, registers, etc.etc., and their relationship to the main series. It should also indicate which of the classes are also to be found in the Governor's Office records of the Colony concerned, with a note of additional information which they may contain, such as memoranda, enclosures etc. etc. In addition for the relevant series, an outline should be given of the relationship of the microfilmed records to those printed in Historical Records of Australia and Historical Records of New South Wales.

Now, let us turn to the second aspect of this problem of making the microfilm copies easily available to the reader. As it is possible that some of you have not yourselves had occasion to make use of these microfilms, you may not be aware of the problems which arise. We intend therefore to describe the films in some detail to provide a background against which a discussion of the most suitable finding aids can take place.

Unfortunately, when the copying of material in the P.R.O. began in 1948, no one had had much experience of large microfilm projects, and apart from planning which period should be tackled in the first instance, and arranging for a search of the less obvious groups and classes to find what Australian material, if any, they contained, little

preparatory work was done. The decision was made that certain series or sections of certain series, should be covered, and the volumes containing these were fed to the camera for copying. An additional difficulty was that, in the early years at least, there was no real continuity of staff engaged in this work, and the officers concerned have generally been able to devote only part of their time to it.

Nowadays it is realised that considerable time should be spent on examination and analysis of the records before filming begins. The existing inventories, registers, lists and indexes are studied to determine their relationships and how their usefulness may be affected when they and the records indexed are both on film. From such an examination it is possible to determine the most logical order to be given these natural units and set up an overall arrangement; it is possible to note also obvious misplacements and disorder which may have crept into series of documents, when they were originally filed or bound, and to arrange for the gaps and irregularities to be flagged and explained. If this sort of thing is done well, the reader is assisted immeasurably in understanding and using his material. The fact that it was not done in 1948 is, as I said earlier, not surprising. It was only in 1951 that the National Archives in U.S.A. published the first edition of The Preparation of Records for Publication on Microfilm (Staff Information Paper No. 19), which describes the principles governing the physical arrangement of the records on the film and the use of identification and finding aids to disclose just what is on each reel and where thereon specific contents may be found. Some of the steps suggested to achieve these ends are the placing of indexes, registers and other finding aids before the records proper when copying, and the preparation of a short accompanying pamphlet for each microfilm publication giving the reader brief details of the origin, value and completeness of the records, together with information as to related sources not contained on the microfilm. Since this paper was published, the ideas set out in it have been further developed and an increasing amount of editorial work in connection with their microfilm projects is carried out in the National Archives.

It is too late to incorporate into the films themselves many of the suggestions contained in the U.S. paper, but we can consider how the inclusion of additional information in the guide may overcome some of the difficulties arising from the lack of such preparatory notes and the organisation of the material itself.

It can be assumed that the research student, either himself or with the assistance of staff, will be able to decide from the description of the records in the guide which of the classes is likely to contain the information he seeks; he may know the series and the approximate date he needs, or he may wish to search registers and indexes for the specific papers concerned. In either case he will want to know to which reel or reels he should turn.

In giving examples in the section which follows we have confined ourselves to what will probably be the best known group to most people hearing this paper - the Colonial Office - and we do not apologise for taking examples from the classes covering Western Australia. Comments made with regard to these will apply equally well to similar classes for other Colonies.

As you are no doubt all aware, typed lists have been supplied in connection with the Joint Copying Project showing the numbers of the reels on which groups of volumes within each class have been copied and the boxes containing each reel are marked with both reel number and the class and number of the volume or volumes copied on it. For instance our list indicates that class C.O. 18 (Original Correspondence, Western Australia) has been copied from 1829 to 1869 as follows:-

Vol. 1 - 18	on reels	292 - 303
19 - 92	" "	424 - 468
93 - 117	" "	752 - 773
118 - 216	" "	1626 - 1715

and a box picked up at random is marked Reel No. 302; C.O. 18/16(2), 17, 18(1) - indicating that it contains the last part of Vol. 16, Vol. 17 and the first part of Vol. 18 of class C.O. 18.

By referring to the List of Colonial Office Records, published in 1911 as Vol. 36 of the Public Record Office Printed Lists and Indexes, and the subsequently produced typed lists which continue this work, it is easy to see that in the above example Vol. 16 contains Despatches, and correspondence of the series Public Offices and Miscellaneous for 1836; Vol. 17 contains the remainder of this latter series for 1836 and Vol. 18 contains Despatches for 1837.

To provide a rather more direct approach, a copy of these lists, marked with the corresponding reel numbers, can be kept for reference, but even so it is a somewhat laborious process to follow through a particular series, - say, despatches only. It is a much more laborious process if the reader is not interested in the series as a whole, but wants to locate letters from or about a particular individual. We know that there is a so called index (actually a partially classified list of the contents) for each volume, at the back, and so filmed after the letters to which it refers. As the whole of a volume is frequently not on one reel, the index may be found on another reel - in some instances it even happens that part of the index is on one reel and the end on a subsequent reel. Having checked the first part on reel A, which also contains all the correspondence to which the index relates, the reader has to turn to reel B to complete his search of the index. He then replaces reel A to look up the reference he has found.

Now what can be done to simplify the procedure? A certain amount of jumping from reel to reel seems to be inevitable, but we suggest that in the guide, following an inventory type description of each

series within a class, a table should be provided setting out the numbers of the reels on which it is contained, the exact dates covering the section on a particular reel and, if only a part of the reel is devoted to the series concerned, the section of the reel on which it will be found.

As an appendix to this paper, a sample inventory for a section of class C.O. 397 (Entry Books of Correspondence, Western Australia) with explanatory notes, has been supplied to serve as a basis for discussion. The purpose of the paper is to prepare the way for a discussion of the whole problem of making the microfilms of the P.R.O. material more easily available for reference. We do not regard the example given in the attached appendix as being the answer, but felt that a more profitable discussion might take place if there were a specific case before you.

Suggested form of Guide to Microfilms of Australian Records in
the Public Record Office

1. General introduction to P.R.O. Records divided into 77 groups (of which C.O. is one).
2. General description for each group with which we are concerned and reference to the classes into which each group is divided.
3. Treat classes by state, not numerically. e.g. the main C.O. classes dealing with W.A. are:-

C.O. 18	Inward correspondence.
C.O. 397	Outward correspondence.
C.O. 19	Acts.
C.O. 20	Sessional papers.
C.O. 21	Government Gazettes.
C.O. 22	Newspapers and Blue Books.

4. Describe individual classes, e.g. C.O. 397, as follows. This class has been described to 1872 only as our copy of the series on film terminates here at present.

C.O. 397. ENTRY BOOKS OF CORRESPONDENCE: LETTERS FROM THE
SECRETARY OF STATE, 1828-72. 29 VOLS. 9 REELS MICROFILM.

Copies of letters sent by the Secretary of State for the Colonies were entered into volumes kept for the purpose and retained in his office. The letters are in date order. Separate registers or indexes were not kept, but at the end of each volume there are certain chronological lists (so called indexes) to facilitate reference to the letters.

The early volumes are paginated with a light manuscript numbering. They also have a darker printed folio numbering. The manuscript page numbering was done extremely inaccurately and does not correspond to double the foliation. Later

volumes have page numbering only and this is in the dark printed numbers. In all cases the page references in the lists at the end of the volumes refer to the pagination numbers.

The letter books can be divided into two groups:

- (i) despatches to the governor of Western Australia and
- (ii) domestic letters to public and miscellaneous officers and individual persons.
- (i) Letters from the Secretary of State (Despatches), 1823-72.

The first volume begins with a letter to Captain Stirling in England appointing him "to conduct the new settlement proposed to be established in Western Australia, with the title of Lieutenant Governor". The despatches which follow consist mainly of instructions issued for guidance in the administration of the colony, but also include other matters such as requests for specific information, etc.

The despatches were numbered spasmodically in the early years, but from March 1836 each one has a running number. The numbering starts again from one each time a new Secretary of State is appointed. It sometimes continues through his term of office or may recommence at the beginning of a new year. (See Appendix IV)

Confidential despatches were included in the volumes in date order, and indexed. Sometimes they are numbered and sometimes not. There are a few printed circular despatches; these are not numbered and not indexed. There are only two volumes during this period which include them. In one volume they are glued on to pages following the general despatches and in the other they come at the end of the volume after the index. In each case they are in date order within their own sequence.

Special entry books for despatches dealing with convicts were kept for the period 1855-64. There are two such volumes. The convict despatches have their own sequence of numbers. Before and after this period convict despatches were entered in the general sequence.

As a copy was made of each despatch, so a brief reference entry was made in a list at the back of the volume. The entries are in date order and the information noted is to whom the despatch was addressed (in nearly every case the governor, but if absent, to his representative), the date sent, a subject entry and the number of the page on which the despatch has been copied.

In the last volume of despatches described in this section (See Appendix I) copies of letters were not entered after 7th Feb. 1872, but the reference list at the end of the volume continues on until 21st Feb. 1873.

Corresponding material in this series held in W.A. is listed below. The series of despatches is not complete as the original was sometimes sent to the relevant department for action. Indexes and registers were kept. The former are combined subject and nominal indexes in three main volumes, 1838-54, 1854-73, and 1874-1909.

Despatches, 1829 - 95.
Duplicate despatches, 1834 - 70.
Circular despatches, 1829 - 98.
Confidential despatches, 1870 - 95.
Convict despatches, 1855 - 64 (duplicates held and separately filed).
Registers, 1829 - 87 (lacking 1848, 1868 - 73).
Indexes, 1838 - 1909.

(ii) Letters from the Secretary of State (Domestic), 1828 - 72.

Although entered consecutively in the letter books these domestic letters include correspondence with other government offices concerned with the administration of the colony as well as with individuals.

The first volume begins with letters dealing with organisation prior to settlement, preparations for the departure of the "Sulphur" and "Parmelia" and the first party to be sent to Western Australia. It includes appointments, correspondence with potential settlers and also contains a number of letters to Stirling. These are of a personal nature dealing with such matters as land grants for himself and letters of introduction for settlers recommended on a personal basis. Later volumes also contain correspondence with the governor, which deals with matters of a personal nature or which has been carried on after he has relinquished his post.

After retirement all correspondence with him has been filed in the domestic series even though it still includes matters which would previously have been dealt with in despatches.

Routine letters to potential settlers are not included, but if any variation from the form letter was called for it was added in a postscript and these have been copied into the letter books. The name and address of the settler is given in every case with a note "settler" and the date on which written to. All letters in the domestic series are unnumbered. Reference numbers of connected correspondence are noted against the letters.

From 1855 - 65 letters dealing with convicts were entered in separate volumes. There are three such volumes. After this date letters about convicts were entered in the general letter books as before.

The index at the end of each volume is broken down into two sections. One section is for private individuals and miscellaneous

offices (See Appendix III) listed in one alphabetical sequence and the other is for public offices (See Appendix II). The index to the first volume has a further breakdown into a section for settlers. There is no cross referencing between or within sections.

In each index entry the information given is to whom the letter was addressed, the date, subject and page number on which copied. In the section for settlers in the first index "settlers" is written in place of subject.

In the last volume described in this series (See Appendix I) copies of letters were not entered after 1st Mar. 1872 but index entries continue to 19th Feb. 1873. From 1868 onwards included in the index are notes of letters which have not been copied. As no page reference can be quoted in the index a reference to related correspondence is given against each of these entries. e.g. "7th April 1868. Crown Agents. Return for quarter ended 31st Dec. 1867 of intestate estates - enclosures. 15/3293." These appear in most cases to be form letters only, covering an enclosure.

There is no material corresponding to this series held in W.A.

APPENDIX I.

List of Entry Books of Correspondence.

(i) Despatches	<u>C.O. No.</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Reel No.</u>
	397/2	30 Dec. 1828 - 16 June 1936	304
	397/5	1 Jul. 1836 - 22 Apr. 1842	774
	397/7	26 Apr. 1842 - 3 Jul. 1848	775
	.		
	.		
	397/29	18 May 1871 - 7 Feb. 1872	1726
Despatches (Convict).			
	397/17	2 Mar. 1885 - 9 May 1860 (Divides at 22 Feb. 1860)	778, 779
	397/21	12 May 1860 - 26 Dec. 1864	1722
(ii) Domestic			
	397/1	5 Nov. 1828 - 14 Dec. 1829 (Divides at 10 June 1829)	303, 304
	397/3	15 Dec. 1829 - 5 June 1835	304
	397/4	12 June 1835 - 25 Aug. 1840 (Divides at 19 Nov. 1836)	773, 774
	.		
	.		
	397/28	4 May 1869 - 1 Mar. 1872 (Divides at "India Office" in index)	1725, 1726

<u>C.O. No.</u>	<u>Dates</u>	<u>Reel No.</u>
Domestic (Convict). 397/16	10 Mar. 1855 - 10 Oct. 1858	778
397/20	3 Nov. 1858 - 28 Feb. 1863	1722
397/22	21 Feb. 1863 - 23 June 1865	1723

APPENDIX II.

List of Public Offices used in Indexes.

Give note on subject matter of correspondence with the different offices as confusion arises between headings of a similar nature, e.g. "Commander-in-chief" and "War Office", "Admiralty" and "Navy Office".

<u>Office</u>	<u>Years</u>
Acts.	1845 - 49
Admiralty.	Every volume.
Agents.	Every volume.
.	
.	
.	
War Office.	Every volume.

APPENDIX III.

List of Miscellaneous Offices.

<u>Office</u>	<u>Years</u>
Aborigines Protection Society	1840 - 45
Australian Steam Navigation Company	1851 - 53
Bank of Australasia	1845 - 49, 1849 - 51.
.	
.	
.	
West Australian Company	1840 - 45

APPENDIX IV.

Numbering of Despatches.

1828 - 36 More unnumbered than numbered despatches.

No. 1, 30 Dec. 1828	-	No. 4, 13 Jul. 1829.
1, 30 May 1830	-	3, 25 Oct. 1830.
1, 28 Apr. 1831	-	22, 9 Mar. 1833.
1836 - 42 No. 16, 1 Jul. 1836	-	96, 1 Aug. 1838.
B, 4 Aug. 1838	-	17, 11 Dec. 1838.
1, 11 Jan. 1839	-	11, 4 Feb. 1839.
.		
.		
.		
etc. etc.		