

LIBRARIANS CAN WIN HISTORIANS, AND STILL INFLUENCE

OTHER PEOPLE

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Most articles in this journal, and indeed most readers of it, deal with problems of gathering and organising material in libraries and archives and preparing them for use. I want to look at the ease of access to records from the particular viewpoint of one academic user, a member of one of the groups for which libraries exist.

My relations with libraries have generally been from the outside as a normal reader; only in a few places have I had direct access to the stacks. Mostly then I have had to rely on the efficiency of the organisation of the library to meet my particular need. It is the comparative efficiency, not so much of mechanical aids like catalogues, but more importantly of the personal service of librarians that I want to discuss. There should not be much difference between a guide to records in London, Suva or Brisbane; whereas there are often much clearer differences between librarians in Aberdeen, Cambridge or Sydney.

I am preparing a biography of a colonial administrator, Sir William MacGregor, once called "a model of what a colonial governor should be", who fortunately for the comparative factor served in many parts of the British Empire when it was far-flung with its large red spots all over the globe. MacGregor, the son of a labourer, was born in Scotland near Aberdeen in 1846 - so I have worked in the Aberdeen city library (notably newspaper files and church records), Aberdeen County Council departments (for example, Education and Land), and Aberdeen Grammar School archives. As well such fulsome records as the census returns (1841, 1851, 1861 and 1871) in the Edinburgh General Registry Office gave details of the crofts where the MacGregors lived, and the ages (varying with his father's memory) of his siblings. Besides this I culled the minds of his relatives, some of whom still live around Aberdeen.

He began studying for the Presbyterian Ministry at Aberdeen University - so I consulted the University archives for his achievements in first year Arts in 1867-8. Then he turned to medicine - partly because of his uninspiring results in Greek and Latin - which he studied at Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities. With the help of historians and librarians I unearthed the relevant records of these Universities which gave meticulous details, not only of final graduation, but also annual class lists and even attendance.

Graduated, MacGregor obtained in 1871 a medical position in the Lunatic Asylum at Aberdeen. Soon the limited financial possibilities of this sort of job, and possibly his own suspect health, led him to become interested in a medical appointment in the colonies. At this time Sir Arthur Gordon, from near Aberdeen himself, was seeking a doctor for the Seychelles and fortunately for the future career of MacGregor he accepted the offered position. For records we have now reached the vital repository for anybody working on British colonial history, the Public Record Office. Tucked away in a Mauritius volume are MacGregor's first letters to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.¹ The conditions he set before accepting the appointment show all his native financial acumen as well as his concern for security:

1. What are the duties of the Assistant Medical Officer (A.M.O.), and to whom as a principal, and to what extent is he responsible?
2. Are medicines and surgical appliances supplied to the A.M.O.?
3. Is there any chance of the A.M.O. being able to add anything to his salary by private practice or other honorable means, or in the event of his giving satisfaction, is there a possibility of an increase in salary after a short time?
4. In the event of his becoming invalided would he receive any assistance from Government?

1. C.O. 167/549
10450 Letter of 19th Oct., 1872.

5. Is there any residence or attendance provided for the A.M.O.?
6. Does the commencement of service date from the commencement of passage out?
7. Would there be any encouragement for the prosecution of scientific pursuits?

In January 1873 MacGregor and his wife Mary sailed for the Seychelles, where they were to serve until 1875. Clearly the P.R.O. is the source for one class of relevant material, the despatches of the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies with some enclosures going down to lower levels of the official strata, though very rarely down to the letters of an Assistant Medical Officer to his superior. Such lower echelon records which have survived would be in the Archives at Port Louis. So I wrote to the Archivist; his deputy Dr. Adolphe proved his Teutonic efficiency and helpfulness by sending me full details of every reference to MacGregor he could find.

Sir Arthur Gordon met William MacGregor in the Seychelles and the two formed a firm friendship which was to be lifelong. The records of this are in the British Museum in the Stanmore Papers (Gordon became Lord Stanmore) where, with some frustrating gaps, almost every letter MacGregor wrote to Stanmore between 1879 and 1912 is preserved.

This friendship led Gordon, appointed as Governor of Fiji, to invite MacGregor to go with him as Chief Medical Officer. For thirteen years MacGregor was to serve in Fiji, filling various appointments, many simultaneously. He was C.M.O., Receiver-General (or Treasurer), Collector of Customs, Secretary for Native Affairs, Commissioner for Lands, Agent-General for Immigration, Commissioner for Stamps, Assistant High Commissioner and Consul-General for the Western Pacific, Chief Secretary and Acting Administrator.

Again the records are divided. In the P.R.O. is one copy of the original despatches from the Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies with often invaluable minutes written by the Colonial Office staff. In Suva in the Archives of Fiji and the Western Pacific

High Commission are the rest of the surviving records. While using the London records I met the original Archivist, Miss Dorothy Crozier, as well as one of the few who have worked on the Suva records, Miss Ethel Drus, and both assured me that I would have to go to Suva to work through MacGregor's despatches and minutes. With this knowledge, I wrote to the present Archivist, Mr. Ian Diamond, not expecting that he could give me the coverage I had received from Port Louis. Mr. Diamond's reply, that there were 117 shelving feet of records in the Chief Secretary's office inward correspondence alone, well showed the extent of the records. A list which one of the Archivist's staff culled from the Gazettes gave me exact details of MacGregor's changing posts. Recently I have spent three weeks in Suva in which time I tried my hardest at least to sample adequately these records of MacGregor's thirteen years of busy official life, the energy of which is suggested by his 1887 plaint:

I am simply like an old boat run high and dry with so many ribs stove in. My pay is £760 a year, £40 less than I was offered . . . to stay in Mauritius in 1874 . . . My work is hard enough, too. I start regularly at 7 a.m. to visit the Hospital, prison and Lunatic Asylum, and to teach the native medical students. I get to my office about ten and work there until between four and five, and not unfrequently have to take work home with me.²

Additional primary material for Fiji, important because it was normally so hostile to the Government and to all its officials, comes from the newspapers of the time. The Colindale, the outer London suburb branch of the British Museum, has good files of the 'Fiji Times' and 'Suva Times' which I have perused.

From Fiji MacGregor was promoted to take charge of the new colony of British New Guinea. He owed his appointment not only to his efficiency, praised by every Governor of Fiji and by the C.O. staff, but also to the support given him by Sir Samuel Griffith, then Premier

2. Letter 3.2.1887, pp 130-136, vol. 5, Stanmore Papers, B.M. Mss. 49,203.

of Queensland. MacGregor met Griffith when he represented Fiji at the Federal Council Meeting of 1886 held at Hobart. As with Gordon, MacGregor formed a firm friendship with Griffith, the results of which are preserved in the Griffith papers held in the Mitchell Library. Here there is an almost unbroken series of letters from MacGregor to Griffith from 1904 to 1919.

MacGregor's ten years in charge of New Guinea are probably the most significant of his career, for much of New Guinea policy has developed along the lines he began. For records the P.R.O. is by far the most complete source, for the lower echelon records have been sadly ravaged by neglect, wilful destruction, dirt and insects. Thanks mainly to the effort of Jim Gibbney of the National Archives all that has survived has been collected in Canberra. I covered the P.R.O. records while writing a Cambridge thesis on the early administration of British New Guinea and I have since been through the very incomplete central Port Moresby and other outlying station records.

Another source, tragically incomplete, are four volumes of MacGregor's own diaries from the years 1890 to 1892 held by the National Library in Canberra. How these four volumes survived is unknown; the National Library purchased them from Angus and Robertson in 1932 who have no record of where they obtained them. I have spent much paper and time trying to find the other diaries which I know MacGregor kept - thus he wrote after his daughter died, "I find that she kept her diary as I did mine, in German, French and Italian on successive days, and as well written as I could have done it."³ but these four volumes are all that seem now to be preserved. The latest clue is through MacGregor's granddaughter; her London solicitors have written to her but so far no reply. Perhaps some library does hold them, perhaps some second-hand bookshop, but I fear a more likely fate of burning or pulping. Lists such as the Chancery Lane National Register of Archives or my advertisements in English and Scottish newspapers have not led to any further clues to the whereabouts of these diaries.

Fiji and New Guinea governmental and private records of MacGregor's

3. 19.2.1919 to S.W. Griffith, Mitchell Library, uncat. Mss.,
Set 363, vol.6.

life are supplemented by other primary sources, in particular the records of the missionary societies working in these parts of the Pacific. As with others who have worked in Livingstone House, the London headquarters of the London Missionary Society, I remember with gratitude the help and friendly interest of their librarian, Miss Fletcher. Chalmers and Lawes are well-known individuals to her, while the records are kept in excellent order, marred only by London blitz destruction of part of the series. As a modern "wandering scholar" I must admit to regret that the A.N.U. has now microfilmed these records - though as with other microfilm projects it will obviously be invaluable to have copies of such records in Australia. Besides the L.M.S., the Anglican Church Missionary records had a few references to the MacGregor New Guinea period.

For Fiji the Methodist Church is most important with their records deposited in the Mitchell Library but still under the control of the Church. I am grateful for the Reverend Gribble's ready granting of unlimited access to the records of the overseas branch of his Church.

From New Guinea MacGregor went as Governor to Lagos, now part of Nigeria. The location of sources should be falling into a pattern now: the P.R.O. files; the material in the Nigerian archives which I hope some day to cover - though less important than the Fijian archives as MacGregor was always Governor, it would of course be significant to see his letters to subordinates, and his minutes on inward correspondence; the church records, this time in the Church Missionary Society in London; the newspaper files and the Colindale. Repositories so far unmentioned include the Rhodes House Library at Oxford, for the Aborigines Protection Society records, and the Colonial Office Library where I found copies of MacGregor's long reports on various problems. The range of his interests is suggested by some of the subjects - coffee leaf disease (Fiji); problems of administration (N.G.); Malaria (Lagos and Egypt after a visit there with Ross); Trade of Newfoundland and visits to Labrador (Newfoundland); tertiary education (Queensland), the postwar settlement of the Pacific (after retirement).

Partly in disfavour because of his over close friendship with native chiefs near Lagos - MacGregor took the Alake of Abeuketa to England in 1904 - and because of his criticism of the Crown Agents system (which unfortunately for him was published in a book, "Affairs of West Africa", written by Morel), MacGregor was "sent down" in his next appointment as Governor of Newfoundland.

"It grieves me now that all the little special knowledge and experience I possess should be utterly useless . . . I can do nothing whatsoever . . . that will be of use to me or any other person . . .

"This place is fossilised. I fear there are very many things and practices that would shock you. The worst is that I can do so very little to improve matters."⁴ Again the P.R.O. records, the records which may not exist in Newfoundland, and St. John's newspapers files besides the two continuing series of letters to Stanmore and Griffith have given me a certain coverage of his achievements here. The long drawn-out fishing dispute between the U.S.A. and Britain, and Britain and France provided his main concern, and did add another repository, as the Bryce Papers (James Bryce was British Ambassador in Washington) are in the Bodleian at Oxford.

MacGregor, now 62 years old, had been longing to return to Australia. There are letters to Deakin, as I have been told by Dr. Francis West, in the Deakin Papers, besides his appeals to Griffith:

My great desire to go to Queensland was in the first place to be near a few old friends like yourself . . . to be there to keep an eye on and visit British New Guinea. Add to this ~~that~~ I like Queensland as a place.⁵

At last in March 1909 he obtained the Governorship of Queensland. P.R.O. records to 1910 - so far as they were open when I was in London in 1960 - records held in our own State Archives (for example, MacGregor's despatches to the Secretary of State), records of the Q'ld. Uni. of which he was the first Chancellor, letters to Griffith now Chief Justice of Australia and so in Melbourne, and newspaper comments have given me some

4. 14.7.1904 and 10.10.1904 to S.W. Griffith.

5. 2.12.1904, to S.W. Griffith.

outline of his work here. Personal recollections are also helpful, for instance I have talked to Mr. J.D. Story, the late Vice Chancellor of the University of Queensland, who well remembers Sir William's aid to the University.

In 1914 MacGregor retired after 42 years of colonial service. For the five years before his death on 3rd July, 1919, when he lived near Earlston in the border country between Scotland and England, I have to rely on his letters to Griffith, some memories of him particularly by his Scottish nieces and his executor Lord Sempill, his few writings (e.g. his chapter on "Disease and Treatment" in Rivers, Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia), and his will and probate papers. His will came from Somerset House where I searched for other certificates of births, deaths and marriages. Thanks to the generosity of his Edinburgh solicitors, I have copies of legal papers filed in a long dispute over the interpretation of the wills of himself and of his second wife, who died only a few months after he did. This dispute between his daughter and his granddaughter has given me copies of letters written by MacGregor at various stages of his life to his children, and revealed some of the unhappiness of so much of his domestic life.

Sir William MacGregor has then taken me to libraries and repositories in various corners of the world where I have always turned pages and, when library efficiency was not so high, shaken dust off records. The first and obvious point to make is that I am only one of a large and growing number of "wandering scholars" using many libraries. Every person on a library staff should realize that we are always comparing the standard of service we obtain.

The familiar human qualities of genuine interest and friendliness when combined with knowledge of what is held in the library must impress. Lack of interest, rudeness, ignorance of what is held (or where to find catalogues or someone who does know) must repel readers. Usually I have had a limited time at my disposal so that inefficiency in production can be disastrous and wasteful.- disastrous to the

efficiency of my research, wasteful of my own funds or of those supporting me. Clearly as a class academic users do not expect better service than other genuine users (a government department may want an answer to an urgent query in hours, no research student can claim that degree of haste!), but we do claim efficient service. As one who has listened to the idle gossip of librarians in Sydney, Canberra and London while twiddling my thumbs awaiting production of records, I am convinced that most libraries have periods of sheer inefficiency! Obviously letters to librarians should precede a trip to Suva or even the old Stores Building in Brisbane's William Street, though sometimes this is impossible. I have watched and heard the Deputy and Assistant Keepers in the Round Room of the P.R.O. and been amazed by their imperturbable and efficient responses to incredible sequences of unexpected queries - varying from genealogical enquiries about 16th Century ancestors (from people dropping in for half an hour on a vacation from the States) to someone wanting details of land ownership in a London suburb. They are usually efficient whatever the notice and whatever the query, though workers there are human too: I have been frustrated when the attendants have put back a volume I had reserved for the next day, or fretted at the time I took to obtain documents from their repository at Ashridge. The British Museum could not be surprised at any query, and one can surely excuse relatively slow production when their book stock is so enormous. Delays like this are much harder to excuse in the much smaller and, I think, far less efficient for readers, National and Mitchell Libraries.

The "rely fully only on yourself" maxim is proved again and again. One can write to most librarians and receive firm denials of any relevant holdings often after weeks of delay or search by their research staff - only to find when one reaches the library after a few minutes search of a catalogue or from references in other works that they hold vitally relevant documents. The Griffith-MacGregor correspondence was, for instance, as late as February 1961, not catalogued under MacGregor in the Mitchell. I realise that I am counselling perfection in cross-reference, for I will admit that

MacGregor is not as important to the vast majority as he is to me, but let us at least keep perfection as an ideal!

I wrote to the Edinburgh Registrar-General's Office for copies of the death certificates of William MacGregor and his wife. There was a firm denial of any record of his death, yet when in Edinburgh I found it for myself, properly indexed.

Let it be stressed again that for all of us in research time should be of the essence. Let me first strongly affirm that to me research is the most interesting and absorbing part of my academic existence. never to be treated lightly. I have mentally written off all my colleagues who have referred to my "holidays" in London, Scotland, and more recently Suva - in retaliation I can only say that those on a university staff who do no original research are creatures of unmentionable names. Below this supposedly more intelligent level I can still grin and bear (just) references to "pleasure" trips for research, although admittedly when made by university graduates my blood boils at the low standard we are allowing to slip through! Secretaries are exempt from censure - they have to type for me!. But to return to time, if one agrees that original research is important, then library staffs have a vital part to play in avoiding any wasting of the scarce and valuable commodity of time. Every slovenly piece of research in response to a written request, every delay in replying or producing books and documents, is a double waste of time.

But, it may be objected, if every librarian is to treat every user of his library, archives or repository efficiently, and equally as a genuine inquirer - there must be more staff. My only answer, from one who is sympathetic to need for expansion of staff, is that all genuine users only claim equality for all genuine users (let us exclude boy-friends, visiting to gossip; and perhaps even the shelterer from the rain - though he could be converted by a book!) and that every library I have been to has the same problems of staff shortages, yet some are more efficient than others.

But this is enough, the gathering of material is but one part of

the process of research, I have fulfilled my promise to your editor to fill a few pages, now to turn back, in such time as can be found between such mundane academic tasks as lecturing, marking essays and answering queries from students, to writing, from my thousands of pieces of paper culled from libraries, something historically significant about Sir William MacGregor.

THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

BOARD OF EXAMINATION, CERTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION OF LIBRARIANS

NEWS RELEASE

To meet the criticism often made that news of the Association's activities does not reach members, the Board of Examination has decided as an experiment to publish a news release after its meetings. If this is welcomed by members it will be continued. The Board will be happy to receive comments on the idea.

Following the decision made by General Council last year that the Board of Examination should meet twice a year as a normal matter, a meeting was held in Sydney on 18-19 April 1962. On the first day the Board sat from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., on the second from 9.30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The composition of the present Board is representative of the whole of the Commonwealth and of all types of library. Two members (Miss Radford, the Chairman, and Miss Whyte) come from New South Wales, two from Victoria, (Miss Doubleday and Mr. Lodewycks) and one each from Queensland (Mr. Sharman) Tasmania (Miss Ramsay) and Western Australia (Mr. Sharr).

The major topics discussed were: examination papers from 1962, the new syllabus, clash of dates with university examinations, regulations for the Registration Certificate in Archives, school librarians, and the examinations and the appointment of senior examiners. This may not seem much to occupy eighteen hours of discussion but must be remembered that a certain amount of the Board's work is confidential or is concerned with the mechanics of running the examinations throughout Australia and abroad and which is not newsworthy.

Examination Papers

Every question was closely scrutinized to ensure that it was clear, unambiguous, definitely within the syllabus and of the type and standard required for the new examinations.