

AN EXPERIMENT IN ARCHIVES CLASSIFICATION

The purpose of this article is to describe procedures recently adopted in the Queensland State Archives for the classification of public records. The Archives was established towards the end of 1959, and at that date comparatively few public records were available for processing. As soon, however, as accommodation became available, departments, acting under directions from the Public Service Commissioner's Department, began to inundate us with the accumulated dross of their records rooms. There was little opportunity for the Archives staff to be selective as to which records were to be transferred. Accumulations in valuable records areas in such central Brisbane city buildings as the Treasury Building, the Executive Building and the Taxation Building had to be cleared. The Archives had to accept them, whether they were the 1859 letterbooks of the Chief Commissioner for Crown Lands, or the 1958 art union files of the Justice Department.

The accommodation made available was of a tentative nature. The Archives building itself was originally a Commissariat Store, erected by convicts in 1829. An additional floor had been erected on the main stone structure in about 1910, and a two story brick wing some time between the two last-mentioned dates. Several outhouses or skillions had been constructed alongside the original building, and these, and the ground floor of the stone section, were, and still are, subjected to white-ant infestation. No steel shelving was ordered for the building, and at the time of the appointment of the present writer as State Archivist two other Departments occupied all but one room of the building. These were the State Stores Board, and the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission. They remained in occupation for some time — the former until September 1960, and the latter until October 1962. Even to-day, one floor of the original stone section is completely occupied by newspapers belonging to the Public Library, and is therefore not available for the storage of public records.

I have gone into this question of accommodation in some detail, because any system of classification of archives must have regard to facilities for storage. This is particularly true where storage facilities are primitive, or do not lend themselves to easy adaptation. The shelving with which the Archives building has been equipped is in the form of wooden racks, which cannot be adjusted easily to provide for volumes and bundles of differing sizes. The building is difficult from the point of view of access. Records delivered to the building are unloaded at the ground floor in Queen's Wharf Road, yet the most suitable area for working quarters is on the second floor, which has access direct from William Street, but this access is suitable only for foot traffic, and will not take trolleys or other wheeled vehicles. The only stairway from the ground floor to the first floor is at one extreme corner of an L shaped building, and the only stairway from this to the second floor is almost at the other extreme of the building. An antiquated goodslift serves these three floors, and the low-ceilinged, unlined attic.

The methods used for the arrangement and description of public records in the Queensland Archives were imported without substantial alteration from the Tasmanian Archives. These methods have been described in detail by P. R. Eldershaw in his article⁽¹⁾ "Accessions procedure in Tasmania".

The term "transfer" was used for all the records transferred from one agency or individual at the one time. These transfers were numbered, and within each transfer each bundle or volume was numbered according to the order in which it was accessioned. Thus, accession no 67/42 would be the forty second item

⁽¹⁾ *Bulletin for Australian archivists*, 1955.

accessioned from among those records designated as transfer no : 67. Before accessioning was carried out, of course, the records were put into some kind of order. All items in each series were accessioned together, and were taken in order, whether that order was numerical, alphabetical, regional or chronological. Indexes and registers were as a rule accessioned in order next after the records to which they related.

A series of loose leaf volumes was used for an accession register. These registers provide, in five separate columns, for the accession number, the description (including dates), the sub-numbering, the date of registration, and the classification number (which is not allocated until some time later) of each item. There is also a column for remarks. A label is typed for each item, and this bears an identification paragraph, setting out the source from which the item was acquired, and the date of transfer (these details are cyclostyled in, being common to every item in any one transfer) and a "particular item" paragraph, giving the provenance, description, dates and accession number of the particular item. These latter details correspond to the entry in the accession register.

The transfer of the records, once it has been completed by the entry of these particulars in the accession register, is then acknowledged. The form used to acknowledge the completed transfer is called, as in the Tasmanian Archives, an accession record, and on this form the records are listed, not item by item, but series by series. Thus, if a series consists of 20 volumes, these will have been listed one by one, with the separate opening and closing dates, in the accession register, but in the accession record only one entry appears, and the dates given are the earliest and latest ones, except where gaps in chronological coverage make it desirable for intermediate dates either side of these gaps to be mentioned. The accession record also shows the linear footage of each series, and covering accession numbers. It allows the head of the transferring authority an opportunity to stipulate to what extent public access will be allowed to the records.

Continuous control catalogue cards are typed from these accession records. One card is typed for each series. The entry, by which the cards are arranged (in alphabetical order) is under the name of the creating authority, and a typical continuous control catalogue card would read :

INSPECTOR OF PACIFIC ISLANDERS, MARYBOROUGH

Ledger of deposits and withdrawals in Pacific Islanders' Savings Bank accounts

Feb. 1885 — Nov. 1907

1½"

27/306

The arrangement of these cards in the catalogue drawers enables the student, or the staff member, to locate particular series in archival custody, as long as the provenance is known. It enables us to show just how many different series of records created by, for example, the Crown Solicitor, are held in the Archives. It provides also the basis for the further classification of our holdings.

For some time we have felt that the system adopted to arrange our records is somewhat unsatisfactory. Theoretically, the records have been arranged in the order in which they were received. This means, or should mean, that Transfer No : 1 would have first place in the shelves, to be followed by Transfer No : 2, and so on. In practice, this has not been practical. Those transfers which consisted mostly of bundles of foolscap size were usually placed on the shelves on the ground floor, for these shelves were of a size suitable for housing foolscap bundles. Other transfers, those with a large proportion of volumes, had to go elsewhere. It was, moreover, rather awkward that Transfers Nos : 35 and 88 should be separated

by all the records in Transfers Nos : 36-87, for 35 and 88 both consisted largely of selection registers of the Lands Department, Transfer No : 35 having consisted of those registers which the Department had set aside as obsolete in about 1910, and No : 88 having consisted of those so set aside about 1934.

Other archivists have encountered these problems, and have adopted various methods of coping with them. In our case, we decided that the system should be changed radically, and that we should refrain from arranging records in accession order. We decided that in future, from the moment of accessioning, all records should bear symbols indicating, not accession order, but record group, series and item.

Thus we have tried to put into operation a simplified form of the Archives classification as outlined by P. R. Eldershaw in his article^(*) " Archives classification in Tasmania ". However, our system differs in several important particulars from that outlined by Mr. Eldershaw. First, we are classifying these records at the moment of accession, not some months, or years, after accessioning, when we have had a chance to get a better perspective and see the records in relation to their fellows. Secondly, we have decided to use common symbols (i.e., symbols which will apply to all records, irrespective of record group) for certain series which are likely to occur in many record groups. These common symbols are letters of the alphabet from A - M, although for obvious reasons I is not used.

The third major difference between our scheme and the Tasmanian one is in our provision for a large class of miscellanea (i.e., records not grouped as parts of any series) at the beginning of each record group. In the Tasmanian scheme, there must always be at least three elements in the classification number for any one item. Thus, a class number might be LSD 14/24, the LSD standing for Lands and Surveys Department, the figure 14 being the fourteenth series of that record group according to their classification system, and the figure 24 indicating the 24th item in that series. Our system has some location numbers with only two elements — e.g., SUR/24 is the 24th item in the miscellany class at the beginning of the Survey Office record group.

A fourth innovation is in the wide-spread use of a regional break down for records created elsewhere than in the head office of a State Government Department. I shall refer to this again at a later stage.

The first step in the classification of our records was a decision as to the grouping of Government departments into four main categories. These categories are Administration, Justice, Lands & Works, and Sociology (for want of a better word). The decision to establish these was based to a large extent on the peculiar dictates of our building. There are four main areas suitable for storing records, each nearly 2,000 square feet in area. Two of these are at ground floor level, and two on the first floor. One of those on the first floor is still occupied by newspapers belonging to the Public Library, but it is hoped soon to have these clear for our " Sociology " category.

The scheme involved also a consideration of what use our supplementary records storage areas would be put to. We have 4,096 square feet equipped with Compactus steel shelving, in the Anzac Square public buildings, bounded by such central " business heart " streets as Adelaide, Edward and Ann. This area we determined should continue to be used for the storage of records of departments whose headquarters were located in the building (principally Titles Office, Public Curator and Company Registration Office) and for records of the Supreme Court. We have also 2,000 square feet in the former Lady Bowen Hospital building in

(*) *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 1, no. 2, June 1956.

Wickham Terrace. Because of its distance from our own headquarters, we decided to use this for certain records which were most infrequently used. One such category of records are those compiled by local courts and clerks of petty sessions, in parts of Queensland other than the metropolitan area. Another category which we placed in the Lady Bowen building are the records of shires, towns and cities, our collection including those of about a dozen different local government bodies.

The Administration category includes records of the Governor's Office, the Colonial Secretary's Office (later Home Secretary's Office, later Department of Health and Home Affairs, now Department of Health), the Executive Council, the Premier's Department, the Agent-General's Office, the Public Service Commissioner's Office, the Auditor-General and the Treasury. These departments are concerned with the supervision of overall policy, and form a convenient group, despite the fact that Health has to be included here (thanks to its direct descent from Colonial Secretary's Office) whereas it would more logically appear in the Sociology category. The rationalization for this Administration category is that it includes records for all departments responsible to the Premier, the Minister for Health and the Treasurer, as at 1964.

Records in the Justice category are simply those of departments responsible to the Minister for Justice. These include records of Public Curator Office, the Crown Solicitor, the Electoral Office, the Supreme Court and the Titles Office. Records of District Courts outside Brisbane, and of non-metropolitan Summons and Magistrate's Courts, are not in practice included in this category, as they have been removed to the Lady Bowen building.

The Lands and Works category includes departments who are dealing with natural resources and national projects. These departments include, of course, the Departments of Lands and of Works, but also Local Government, Irrigation and Forestry, Mines and Main Roads, Primary Industry, Housing and Transport.

Finally, the "Sociology" category is somewhat amorphous. The Department of Education's records are included here, as well as those of the Department of Labour and Industry, the Police Department, and the newly-created Department of Industrial Development. Native Affairs records will be included here, as the Minister for Education is also responsible for this sub-department.

The next step in our re-organisation involved the determination of what constitutes a record group, and a decision as to the use of symbols to indicate the name of the group. We were persuaded, largely because of Tasmania's successful use of a similar system, to settle for something less than an archive group. We do not claim that each record group consists of—

All the archives of a department or office which is or was an organic whole, complete in itself, capable of dealing independently without any added or external authority with every side of any business which is related to its normal functions⁽³⁾.

Indeed, under Australian constitutional law, it is doubtful if any authority other than the Executive Council would meet this definition of an archive group. A record group, according to my definition consists of all the extant public records of an authority which had the right to conduct correspondence in its own name, and maintained a registry for the preservation of its official records.

⁽³⁾ From the *Instructions for the preparation of inventories* circulated by the then Archives Division of the Commonwealth National Library in 1955, and compiled by a sub-committee of the 1954 Seminar on Archives Management.

This definition saved me from having to recognize a multiplicity of record groups in the local court situation, but it also enabled me to recognize as a separate record group such offices as the Survey Office. In the local court situation, there is likely to be a great number of separate authorities, or at least jurisdictions, all compiling records. Thus you have a Summons Court, a Magistrate's Court, a Valuation Appeal Court, a Licensing Court, and possibly several others. At the same time, the Stipendiary Magistrate keeps a notebook, and the Clerk of Petty Sessions compiles letterbooks. In truth, however, there is really only one registry, maintained by the Clerk of Petty Sessions, so we recognize only one record group for each place where a Clerk of Petty Sessions operates. We do not, of course, include records of higher courts like the District Court, in this record group, even though the C.P.S. might act as registrar.

We decided to use three letters for each record group, followed by a number indicating the region for such record groups as were brought into existence in regional branch offices. Thus SUR indicates the Survey Office (i.e., the head office, in Brisbane) and SUR 3 indicates a District Surveyor's office in the Wide Bay/Burnett district. As a rule, we used the first three letters of the key-word in the title of the office, rather than initials of the three most important words, as we thought the former plan served better as a memory aid. Thus SUG suggests (to me, at any rate) SUGAR, which suggests Central Sugar Cane Prices Board, in a way that SCP, or CSC, would not. At times, we had to depart from this rule — for instance, having used PRI for Prisons Department, we could not use it for Commissioner of Prices (so we settled for CPR for the latter).

We used initials also for those record groups whose names were very commonly suggested by those initials. For instance, the records created in the local court situation are described as CPS. Those of the Public Service Commission are grouped as the PSC group. The tendency has been to ignore changes of name unless these were accompanied by a significant change of function. The Colonial Secretary's Office record group is called COL, even for those years (1896-1936) when it was known as the Home Secretary's Office. After 1936, when it became the Department of Health and Home Affairs, the abbreviation HHA is used, and a new record group is recognised, largely because this is a convenient date to take note of those changes whereby an "internal affairs" department was gradually becoming a health department. IRR is used for records of the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission, and its predecessors, right back to the office of Hydraulic Engineer, have been bundled together in this group.

Just as these rules were being formulated, the Premier of the State announced changes in the titles of several departments, and the creation of two new ones. These changes confirmed our choice of abbreviations in most cases, and would have caused us some concern had we used initials rather than the first three letters of the key word. Thus the Department of Public Works became the Department of Works, the Department of Public Lands became the Department of Lands, and his own Department, previously Premier and Chief Secretary's Department, became simply the Premier's Department. Not so favourable to our terminology was his decision to call the Department of Agriculture and Stock the Department of Primary Industry, nor his adoption of the title Health Department for the Department of Health and Home Affairs.

The system involves the use of some mnemonic features. Where possible, the letters CT are used for the records of a court, and BD for those of a board. Thus SCT is Supreme Court, DCT is District Court, LCT Land Court and so on; LBD is Land Board, BBD Bridges Board, MBD Marsupial Board, and DBD Dingo Board.

In all cases where the records emanate from a regional branch office, the symbol for the record group includes a number, following the three letters chosen as an abbreviation. The regional division chosen for this system was taken from the *Queensland Yearbook*, and is based on groupings of local government bodies. The metropolitan area is 1, the Moreton District outside the metropolitan area is 2, the Maryborough statistical division is 3, and so on. Thus records of the Clerk of Petty Sessions, Maryborough, are in the record group CPS 3. If there is more than one Clerk of Petty Sessions in a statistical division, letters A, B, C, etc., are used to distinguish the different ones. Thus the statistical division for the Gulf country is 14. The records of the Clerk of Petty Sessions, Normanton, form the record group CPS 14A, those of the Clerk of Petty Sessions, Croydon, are CPS 14B, and so on. Records of Land Agents, Mining Wardens, Marsupial Boards, Commissioners of Crown Lands, and a host of other regionally distributed offices are treated in the same way. Local government records, however, are treated differently, owing to the confusion that would result in the use of three letters for the very many shires, towns and cities in Queensland. With these records, the number for the statistical division is placed first, followed by three letters (usually the first three letters of the name of the local government area). Thus records of the Shires of Barcoo and Winton are not separated by all the record groups coming between these two names in alphabetical order. These two shires are in statistical division 9 (Far Western), and the record groups assigned to them are designated 9 BAR and 9 WIN.

At the end of the symbol for the record group, a stroke is placed, and this is followed by symbols for the series and the item, or for the item only, in cases where it has been placed in the miscellany class.

The symbol for a series is always a capital letter of the alphabet, and, as stated earlier, the letters A-M, except I, are common symbols, always having the same meaning. These are as follows :

- A - Inward letters
- B - Registers of inward letters
- C - Indexes to registers of inward letters
- D - Minute books
- E - Executive Minutes
- F - Registers of Executive Minutes
- G - General letterbooks
- H - Indexes of general letterbooks
- J - General correspondence
- K - Registers of general correspondence
- L - Ledgers
- M - Cash books

Where a series consists of more than 20 items, or where it is a series which is still being added to, or is likely to be added to by subsequent transfer, it is allocated a series letter — N, or subsequent letter. If the symbols used for series extend beyond Z, combinations of two letters are used — AA, AB, etc. All other series are placed in the miscellany class at the beginning of the record group. An attempt is made to order these in a significant sequence. Earlier records before later ones, related items together, records reflecting different aspects of the one function being placed in close relationship, etc.

Whether in the miscellany class, or whether given a series identification symbol, each item is given a number, beginning from 1 in each series, and in the miscellany class. That is, the first miscellaneous item under the record group LAN (Department of Lands) is LAN/1, the next LAN/2, and so on. The first bundle of Lands Department inward letters is LAN/A1, the next LAN/A2, and so on.

We are aware of the pitfalls in this kind of arrangement. It may well happen that we place a small series, of say 19 volumes, in the miscellany class, thinking that there is no possibility of subsequent accession. We may later discover that further items in this series are still extant. The system does not really provide for any way in which these items may be placed with the series to which they rightly belong. They may, of course, also be added to the miscellany class, but the earlier classified ones may bear item numbers 1-19, and numbers from 20 onwards will have been used for other items.

The task that faces us at present has to be approached on two fronts. We have to adjust our present holdings to the new system, which means the re-organisation of 20,000 linear feet of records. We have also to tackle the processing of new transfers on the new basis. This latter task is made difficult by the fact that not all the former holdings have been reorganised. Before any new transfer can be accessioned, we have to discover whether any other parts of the series included in the transfer have already been processed and, if so, whether under the old system or the new. The class numbers allocated to new items will vary according to whether or not other items in their series have been received before. If an item is to be placed in the miscellany class, some work must first be done in organising, at least on paper, the miscellany class for the appropriate record group, before the new items can be processed.

The actual accessioning process does not undergo much change. A transfer is still given a transfer number on its arrival, although this number is now only relevant in the early stages of the organisation of the material. The records will no longer be arranged according to this transfer number. When the accession book pages are entered up, entry will be according to record group, class (if miscellaneous) and series. Various pages of the looseleaf register will be set aside for the various series. The transfer number will no longer appear in the accession register, although the "remarks" column will contain a note as to when, and whence, the records came into our custody. The "class no." will replace the accession number on the labels attached to each item, and in the accession register.

For records already accessioned under the old system, schedules are being drawn up, showing the new class numbers, the corresponding old accession numbers, and the linear measurements. On the basis of these, the old accession books are worked through, and new numbers for each item are inserted in the "classification number" column. Notations as to the new numbers are also written on the continuous control catalogue cards.

Eventually, a record group statement will be drawn up for each record group, as has been done in the Tasmanian State Archives. This will form the basis for the preparation of preliminary inventories.

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