

THIRTEENTH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

LIBRARY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

The Thirteenth Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia was held in Canberra from 23rd to 27th August. There were a number of sessions of special interest to archivists, and some of those attending demonstrated the catholicity of their tastes by attending other sessions as well, such as Dr G. W. Hill's paper on the application of computers to library work, Allan Horton's interesting paper on censorship in Australia, Gordon Richardson's report on recent trends in overseas library activity, and Athol Johnson's discussion of the planning of a programme of activities for the Library Association of Australia.

However, it is with the papers of essential interest to archivists that this journal is concerned. These were:—

Polden, K. A.—“The role of records management in Archives administration”.

Pike, Douglas.—“Historical biography and Australian libraries”.

Fischer, G. L.—“Descriptive listing and English speaking unity”.

Gibbney, H. J.—“Reflections on the state of Australian archives”.

Maclean, Ian.—“Archives in a machine age”.

Hutchins, A. J., and Stuckey, B. J.—“The development of correspondence registration and record-keeping systems in N.S.W. government departments, 1788-1910”.

The following summaries and comments have been made partly on the basis of the “Abstracts of Papers” circulated by the Conference Committee beforehand, partly on the basis of notes made by Mr Tony Courtice of Forest Lodge, N.S.W., and partly on the basis of the notes taken by, and the fallible memory of, the Editor.

The first paper of especial interest to archivists was delivered by Mr K. A. Polden, Archivist of the Reserve Bank of Australia, in Sydney. It was entitled “The role of records management in archives administration”. The following summary was given in the “Abstracts of Papers”, and at least serves to introduce the topic.

In his administration, the archivist must observe the two well-known cardinal principles—“respect des fonds” and sanctity of the original order. However, the “original order” refers to filing systems within records-creating agencies, as organised and maintained by records managers. Effective arrangement of archives is, therefore, largely dependent on initial records management practices.

There is, of course, broad scope for close liaison between archivists and records managers. Careful organisation of current records can safeguard against eventual accessions of permanent archives in disorder and the consequent need for time-consuming surveys as a preliminary to arrangement and description.

The archivist is concerned too that records of greatest archival value come into his custody, that what is left behind by records managers—the three, four or five per cent of what was originally created—includes all permanently valuable archives and excludes ephemeral material. The objective demands the active participation of archivists in determining appraisal criteria and disposal scheduling in records management programmes.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to records management practices that can influence these two matters of prime concern to archivists—the value of records transferred for permanent accession and their arrangement.

In addition, Mr Polden informed us that only about five *per cent* of records of the Reserve Bank are permanently retained. The archivist, must, therefore, pay close attention to the drawing up of records disposal schedules when so high a proportion is disposed of.

He recommended a regular “breaking off” of all files, even as frequently as once every twelve months. In the Reserve Bank, the “breaking off” period is five years for policy files. At this point, the earlier accumulations on the file are sent to the Archives. These regular cut-off periods give the records manager better control of intermediate records.

The discussion which followed this paper was fairly full, but it mostly arose out of specific points made in the paper, and was not general enough to be of any use in a summary article such as this.

Professor Pike

Professor Douglas Pike, Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, delivered an interesting, amusing and informative talk on “Historical biography and Australian libraries”. He spoke on the approaches the Dictionary was making to its contributors, and the different types of information that appear in biographical entries. Each entry should contain a statement of the essential objective information about a person—the parentage, the dates of birth and death, whether or not he or she married, the name of wife or husband, the names of children, and the like. There should also be a statement as to what the subject did in life. Other material will include statements attributed to the subject, statements about the subject by his or her contemporaries, statements about the subject by later writers, and the author’s own assessment of the subject. There was some discussion, during which it was made abundantly clear that the selection of subjects was largely the job of local Working Parties, and by and large, the decision as to who would write about the subjects was left to these same working parties. Professor Pike referred to the help given by Australian librarians and archivists, using the illustration of the dogged and finally successful search for Colonel Light’s birthplace as an example of some people’s determination to help. It was also revealed that the Dictionary staff was working on an index of the Australian Copying Project from 1847 onwards. (Up to this date, the index in *Historical Records of Australia* would provide a finding aid to much the same sources as have been copied in the Australian Copying Project).

Mr Fischer

Mr G. L. Fischer, Archivist of the South Australian Archives, gave a wide-ranging and informative paper on methods used in descriptive listing at the Public Record Office, the British Museum, the National Archives and the Library of Congress. Mr Fischer’s paper was summed up in the “Abstracts of Papers” as follows:—

Some comments on listing archives and manuscripts overseas—including the departmental transfer listings of the Public Record Office, aspects of the method of the Additional Manuscripts arrangement in the British Museum, the registers and computer-indexing at the Library of Congress, and the series listing of the

U.S. National Archives. A consideration of the variations of these practices and their likely value to Australian archives and manuscript work where listing methods are already diverse. Is there need or the possibility for English-speaking uniformity or agreement in listing, with some reference to the I.C.A. Lexicon of archival terminology published in 1964.

Mr Fischer also made a brief mention of the methods used in the Archives Office of N.S.W. There was some comment about the wisdom of discarding lists of file headings, which were often disposed of under the British system when records are subjected to their first review, under the procedure laid down in the Grigg report.

Mr H. J. Gibbney

Mr H. J. Gibbney, who has until recently been on the staff of the Commonwealth Archives Office, but has recently been appointed Research Officer with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, delivered a paper entitled "Reflections on the state of Australian archives". This was by far the most controversial of the papers delivered primarily to archivists. Mr Gibbney considered various aspects of the state of Australian archives, and came to the conclusion that this leaves much to be desired. The reasons put forward for the traditional link between archives and libraries are illusory. Their methods differ so fundamentally that they cannot work in harness.

Salaries are a case in point. Subordinated to librarians, the salaries of the principal archivists in each State will remain ridiculously low. The average salary of the seven government archivists in Australia is £2472. Compare this with the salaries of university librarians (whose duties and responsibilities are about equal to those of government archivists) and you see how ridiculously low archives salaries are. University librarians receive £5200.

The registration examination, even with its special provision for archivists, is not, according to Mr Gibbney, acceptable as a qualification for archivists. There is not enough literature available in Australia to teach archives administration properly. The registration examination perpetuates the fallacy that library and archival staff are interchangeable.

There is a great need for decentralisation in state archives institutions. It is a bad policy for states as large as Queensland to have all their archives located at any one place. Regional repositories could well be established.

Literature on archives management in languages other than English is generally unread and unknown in Australia. All the writings based on the important traditions of Germany and Holland are unknown.

An archives section of a *Library Association* is unsatisfactory by definition. About 25% of the professional archivists in Australia have refused to join it. An Australian Society of Record Keepers would be far more satisfactory. Mr Gibbney read a proposed constitution for such a Society.

As readers can well imagine, there was intense interest in Mr Gibbney's paper, and he was questioned and challenged on a great deal of what he had said. To summarise it might well do an injustice to some who had contributed to this discussion. Mr Gibbney's paper will be published, along with others that were presented at the Conference, and a thorough study of it is recommended for anyone who wishes to acquaint himself with archives development in Australia.

Mr I. Maclean

Mr I. Maclean, the Chief Archivist of the Commonwealth Archives Office, gave an address entitled "Archives in a machine age". He developed this theme along four separate lines.—

Buildings and storage

Conservation and repair

Microphotography and documentary reproduction

Electronic data processing

There was a great deal of practical information in this paper, and Mr Maclean's recommendations will be of much use to anyone establishing a new archives repository, or to anyone who has the opportunity to instal new equipment or new methods of repair, such as air-conditioning equipment, compactus shelving, hydrothermographs, laminating plant, micro copying cameras and other such modern aids. On compactus-type shelving, for instance, Mr Maclean commented that, on average-cost suburban land, the cost per shelf foot of erecting a building was almost the same, whether compactus-type shelving was erected or not. Therefore it was advantageous to use this type of moveable shelving, as a more compact and convenient building could be erected. On land of higher value, of course, the saving by using compactus-type shelving is even greater. There was also some useful comment on the proposed new provisions in our laws relating to evidence, the adoption of which will make microfilm copies acceptable in a court of law. Mr Maclean explained the way in which microfilm copies would have to be authenticated. This was a useful session, and archivists throughout Australia will be looking forward to the publication of the text.

Messrs Hutchins & Stuckey

The final session of special interest to archivists was a joint effort, Mr A. J. Hutchins and Mr B. J. Stuckey of the Archives Office of N.S.W., being jointly responsible for both the preparation and the delivery of the paper. The "Abstracts of Papers" provides the following summary:

The paper will cover the early provisions for the keeping of legal records, records relating to land grants and transactions, pardons, the development of registration systems in relation to correspondence of an administrative nature, beginning with the establishment of the office of Colonial Secretary and Registrar of records in 1821. The development of a systematic records registration system in the Colonial Secretary's office from 1826 will be covered, together with the parallel reorganisation of legal records, the development of intra- and inter-departmental memoranda systems, the role of the Executive Council in the administrative framework (and its changing role after the introduction of responsible government). After 1856 the development of separate ministerial departments' registration systems will be dealt with, and the paper will conclude with a description of the introduction of a quasi-classified registration system, the supersession of correspondence registers by card systems, and the abandonment of letter books as a means of recording outwards correspondence.

Those who contributed to the discussion paid tribute to the value of the research that had gone into the preparation of the paper. Nothing quite so comprehensive had been done for the records of an Australian colony. There was some comment on the way in which the annual single number

system had grown up in N.S.W., and on the way in which it spread to other Colonies. The personal influence of individuals who were concerned in the filing of correspondence was also commented on, and the influence of British systems, especially those used in the Navy Board, was mentioned. The paper itself had been available in duplicated form during the address, and Messrs Stuckey and Hutchins gave an indication that when it was more fully edited and checked it would be submitted to the *American Archivist* for publication.

General Comment

There has been criticism of the programme arrangements for the 1965 Conference on the score that there were too many papers, or at least there were too many clashes on the programme. For instance, those who wanted to hear Mr Fischer talk about descriptive listing could not hear Mr Richardson's remarks on recent trends in overseas library activity. Though Mr Richardson is also Principal Librarian, he is a leading figure in the archives world; both he and Mr Fischer have recently been overseas and it is reasonable to assume that anyone interested in the one speaker's remarks would also be interested in the other. Similarly, those interested in censorship (and who is not?) and anxious to hear what Mr Horton had to say about it, had to forego the privilege of hearing Mr Maclean talk about archives in a machine age. And so on. There was not one archives session which did not clash with another session of considerable interest to the present commentator. These are subjective judgements, of course, and so long as there are two sessions on at the one time, though one may be about charging systems in lending libraries and the other about the state of Australian archives institutions, there is bound to be someone who has a deep interest in both. However, it seems possible that the organisers of a conference programme could do a little more to avoid this type of duplication.

Social engagements during Conference Week were well organised, from the launch cruise on Lake Burleigh Griffin on the Sunday (including the barbecue lunch on its shores) to the dance at the Tralee Woolshed on the Wednesday evening. Archivists were also invited to a small social gathering at the home of Mr and Mrs Ian Maclean on Tuesday evening, and this was much appreciated.

R. C. Sharman

EXCHANGE OF ARCHIVISTS

At the Annual Meeting of the Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia held in Hobart in 1963, it was agreed that benefit would accrue to the archives profession in Australia if personnel could be given experience in more than one archives institution. At the Annual Meeting held in Sydney in 1964 it was agreed that, should any member of an archives staff wish to gain experience in another institution, he or she should in the first instance make contact with the head of institution to which he or she would like to be seconded.