

EDITORIAL

The best news that *Archives and Manuscripts* has ever been able to publish, we submit, is contained in this issue. It relates to the proposed visit to Australia of Mr R. H. Ellis, Secretary of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. Mr Ellis is coming to Australia thanks to the efforts of the Library Association of Australia and to the co-operation and financial assistance of the British Council. It is a little premature to announce fuller details of his visit, as these have not really been approved by Mr Ellis yet, and approaches need to be made to certain bodies in Australia from whom some response is needed before we can say exactly what Mr Ellis will be doing in Australia. However, it is understood that Mr Ellis will be in Brisbane at the time of the 14th Biennial Conference, and will be a speaker at that Conference.

The L.A.A. has never before made arrangements for an archivist to visit this country. Dr Schellenberg, it will be remembered, came here as the guest of the Commonwealth National Library, as it was then called, and with help from the Fulbright Foundation. The visit of an overseas archivist has been discussed by members of this Section over a period of two years or more, and great hopes are entertained for some worthwhile promotion work to be done. Mr Peter Walne, of the Hertfordshire County Record Office, has written a lively and engaging letter of introduction for Mr Ellis and we have pleasure in publishing this in this issue. Anyone who reads it will share with us a sense of pleasurable anticipation that one so well qualified and so catholic in interests should be our visiting archivist in 1967.

We are fortunate indeed to have someone visit us who has held the position of President of the Society of Archivists. Many of us will have read Mr Ellis's Presidential address in the *Journal* of the Society (III:2, October 1965). In this enlightening piece of writing, Mr Ellis speaks about the term "profession", and asks what it really means in practical terms. He considers that professional work is characterised by a *belief* in what one is doing; by a certain intelligence and level of education in its practitioners; by ethical integrity; and finally by the existence of a society, association or organisation of fellow practitioners. He enlarges on this last point in these words:

He has, about him, the society of his fellows, the Society (with a big S) or Institute, which enables him to meet and associate with them and offers him backing and support, encouragement, recognition (conversely, rebuke and correction if he goes wrong); which assembles, weighs, selects, guards, and makes available to him the corporate knowledge and wisdom of his fellows, to which he can have instant recourse when (as must sometimes happen) his own will not suffice; which similarly distils and promulgates for his benefit modes of procedure so that he is forearmed to tackle at least the predictable problems which will confront him; which by these means can maintain that uniformity of procedure and performance which will inspire confidence, rightly, in those who make use of his services; which can extract and represent not only the greatest common measure but also the highest common factor of its members, and guard and proclaim the standards of the profession.

The point he makes is rather an important one, and when translated into the Australian environment gives cause for serious reflection. We often tend to look upon our professional association as a sort of optional extra. We make use of it when we want to, remembering to pay our subscriptions when the right to sit for examinations and qualify professionally is dependent upon our being financial members, but if we do not feel so disposed, and if indeed there

is no particular benefit to be gained by continuing to support it, we forget all about it. Our financial membership lapses, and we are eventually "deemed to be resigned".

This is perhaps a particularly frequent attitude on the part of archivists in Australia. Many do not recognize the Archives Section of the L.A.A. as "their association". There is no society of archivists in Australia, though some attempts have been made in the past to establish such a society. It appears most unlikely at the present moment that any attempt to establish a separate society will succeed. This means that, if archivists wish to belong to a professional society, they have little option but to join the Archives Section of the L.A.A., unless they intend to be content with corresponding membership in overseas societies.

The situation, however, is that many of Australia's archivists are not members of the L.A.A. This has not prevented them from joining in the activities of the Association at Conference times, and of course their participation has been welcomed by those who are members. Nor has the fact that they are not members prevented them from receiving issues of this journal. We have been glad to distribute *Archives and Manuscripts* as widely as possible, and have been grateful to some of these non-members because they have contributed much needed articles, which an ever hungry editor has been glad to consume.

The question arises, however, as to whether or not it is worth maintaining the fiction of non-membership in the Association. The non-member archivists are participating in the life of the Association at various points. They do not pay any subscription and therefore, insofar as the benefits they receive are of monetary value, their participation in the life of the Association is at the expense of the general membership. This seems scarcely equitable. It means that school librarians, children's librarians, local public librarians, special librarians and university librarians are paying something (albeit a very small amount) to enable a few "non-subscribing archivists" to make a contribution to the life and thought of the Archives Section.

The visit of Mr Roger Ellis might well provide the opportunity for the total membership of the profession in Australia to join in full support of the one society which is organised to provide a professional association for Archivists. Mr Ellis's presence at the 14th Biennial Conference should make that Conference a really memorable one from the point of view of Australian archivists. It is hoped that all archivists who can be released from their employing institutions will attend. If they do so, it is very much to be hoped that they attend as members of the Section, and, of course, of the parent Association.