

GUIDE TO MANUSCRIPTS IN THE BRITISH ISLES RELATING TO AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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Research for the Guide has been proceeding now for nearly two and a half years. We have completed or practically completed draft descriptions of manuscripts relating to the field in sixty collections out of an estimated three hundred and forty. Still most of the collections we have dealt with are the larger accumulations so that work is further advanced than the number of draft descriptions indicates. It is evident, nevertheless, that the survey cannot be completed in three years. In any case three years was always regarded as a preliminary period.

At this stage I welcome an opportunity of discussing our problems in *Archives and Manuscripts* and of telling its readers how we are faring.

The first problem is of course the enormous quantity to be dealt with. Approach by area and existing knowledge, including the essential information generously given by librarians, archivists and scholars, have been discussed in previous articles but having now had additional practical experience a little more can be said about the benefits we have derived from two sources, the files of the Joint Copying Project at Australia House and the National Register of Archives.

The Joint Copying Project files have led us to a number of collections in private hands and in various libraries and archives as well as in the Public Record Office. The temporary retention of microfilms in London enables us to compile descriptions without the expense and time involved in always consulting the originals. The microfilms of material from the Public Record Office and working keys and reports are a useful supplement to official guides, lists and indexes and where selections have been filmed many hours searching are saved. The 'Guide' has also been useful to the Joint Copying Project. Sometimes our research leads to manuscripts going to Australia or New Zealand, in which case they disappear of course from our drafts, sometimes we find new material for microfilming as in the case of the records of the Society of Friends. Our excursions into the Public Record Office have led to the copying of a considerable amount of new material.

We are deeply indebted to the National Register of Archives. Their *Bulletins* and since 1957, their separate *Lists of Accessions to Repositories* are invaluable. So are their detailed Reports which now number well over ten thousand and their biographical and subject indexes. Supplementing all this is their generous and continual cooperation. By telephone or letter they send us notes of new additions to their reports and indexes and give us hints which may lead to hitherto unrecorded collections.

A second problem already rears its head, or rather two heads, where to stop? Firstly shall we apply the 'fifty year rule' consistently as it is imposed in most, but not all, archives? Considering that the rule is likely to be altered in the near future we have described manuscripts up to the most recent date permitted. Secondly, what shall we do about accessions made to a repository after our visit or correspondence is concluded? Our method is to defer closing a file as long as possible.

One of our problems is that very few subject entries are given in catalogues. Name entries are the rule so we must have lists of names to work on. The *Australian Encyclopaedia*, lists of names to be included

in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, the Royal Commonwealth Society's *Biographical Catalogue* are among our sources.

Coming to the actual compilation of descriptions one is at once confronted with the question of degree of detail. The aim is to give as much description as will enable a scholar to judge where papers exist. When they are scattered in a general series, the subject of which covers a field wider than ours or a number of divisions or aspects of our field, it is often necessary to itemize even if there are general name and subject indexes. As Dr Bernard Crick aptly observes, 'a closely related and highly important collection of fifty or sixty letters could be described in the same space as it takes to describe three trivial and unconnected letters' (1). This, of course, does not imply that a long, closely related series may not consist of thousands of letters and that a few unconnected letters may not be important. Allied to this problem of depth of description is the reliance that can be placed on catalogues and indexes. Naturally they are not compiled from our particular standpoint although it will always be worth citing them and quoting their entries. Also allied to depth of description is the existence of publications giving the text of the papers or making major use of them. We try to cite such publications but we shall not be able to claim that these citations are complete.

With regard to the order in which manuscripts are listed, after careful thought we have followed the arrangement of the custodian rather than a chronological, alphabetical or classified arrangement. One of the latter is adopted only if no filing numbers or symbols exist. In this connection reference should be made also to the arrangement of archives briefly discussed below under Archives of Societies etc.

Rules for form of entry must cover the order in which details are given about each manuscript, use of capitals, variant spellings, compound words, foreign words, italics, dates and punctuation. Many points of style will be finally decided with a printer but it is essential to make the text as consistent as possible even in the draft stage.

In compiling a work designed to be a guide to such diverse and abundant material we find it useful to make an index as we proceed. Our method is to make index entries on cards for each draft description and to type these entries on sheets before distributing the cards in a general alphabet. Problems of choice and subdivision of subject headings and checking of names are provisionally tackled. The indexes on sheets enable us to alter drafts and index simultaneously when necessary. Indexing soon after a draft is made also connects each entry with a particular manuscript, avoiding pitfalls of confusion of identification of names and subjects.

Collections to be described may be divided into five groups, public records, archives and libraries of societies, national, university and public libraries, business records, privately owned papers. Problems so far discussed are common to all. It remains to mention a few connected with one or with one or two groups.

A survey of the Public Record Office is in its early stages. Here are most of the official records which can be included in the Joint Copying Project. An idea of the amount of papers relating to our field can be envisaged when we note that the Project's microfilms of one hundred foot reels from the Public Record Office now number well over three thousand with many more to be copied, each reel accommodating seven hundred to eight hundred exposures. There are also many classes of papers where

the student can delve profitably for specific items of information but which are not suitable for microfilming even if selections could be made. Our aim is to list all relevant groups and their classes, to describe existing keys, to trace as far as is necessary the creation of the classes and indicate the nature of the information to be found.

Public records in other repositories are noted as we come to each office or institution, for example the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich holds Admiralty Records transferred from Deptford and mercantile marine records deposited on loan by the Registry of Shipping and Seamen. We have made only preliminary notes on registry of births, deaths and marriages and probate in England and Scotland. Ireland has still to be tackled. Some of these records are in Somerset House in London and in the National Register House in Edinburgh, some in the custody of churches or local archives. Quarter Sessions and gaol records in countries are not worth searching but they will be listed because records occur of trials of persons transported to Australia. Parish records may contain the minutes of committees charged with the care of the poor (after 1834 Boards of Guardians, Poor Law Unions) and these minutes include references to aided emigration. So far we have surveyed only such records collected by the London County Record Office.

Societies and institutions include such diverse bodies as scientific societies, missionary societies, the library of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and Lambeth Palace. Where access to official papers is permitted they are listed first, followed by miscellaneous manuscripts. For official papers the description follows the logical order of minutes, in-letters, out-letter books and miscellanea. Almost any institution's archives are made complex by the existence of committees and by variety among what is called miscellanea. For example the London Missionary Society has board minutes and minutes of a number of committees, Western Committee (later Southern Committee, South Seas Department), Candidates Committee, and committees called Home Occasional, Foreign Occasional and Special, the last including the Sydney Ship Committee 1908-1921. London Missionary Society correspondence and miscellanea are also very various.

Libraries of all kinds usually maintain catalogues, many of which are printed, and our first approach is a check of catalogues available either in print or manuscript. In the British Museum, by far the greater number of relevant manuscripts are among 'Additional Manuscripts' for which, together with Sloane and Egerton Manuscripts, there are thirty-five published catalogues and indexes and proof pages of a thirty-sixth volume covering accessions received 1931 to 1935. Additional manuscripts catalogued in these volumes have reached a total of 44,835 and typescript handlists of later accessions are available with a rough slip index ⁽²⁾. This is a complex series not necessary for all libraries but for many there are several published volumes and a number of manuscript or typescript catalogues, calendars or indexes.

Business records should be fairly straightforward, falling into the sections enumerated for the archives of all bodies, minutes, correspondence, accounts, miscellanea. It is not often, however, that the firm maintains an archives accessible to students. Difficulties occur also in searching for firms connected with our field and in discovering the correct approach when seeking permission to consult the records.

Papers in private possession may be a large family archive, a few boxes or packets or a small number of letters, diaries or other papers.

The possibility of their transference to the sale room must always be faced and reference has been made already to transmission of papers to Australia or New Zealand. Copyright is also especially important when dealing with private papers, whether they are still in personal possession or transferred to an institution, and the latter throws the onus of not infringing copyright on to the student ⁽³⁾. A further problem also arises if the owners consider that any published description may affect market value should they or their descendants decide to part with the originals. A request to make a description does not raise so much opposition as a request for permission to photocopy or publish but the difficulty exists. Fortunately a great deal of the valuable manuscript material in our field, over which private persons have control, belongs to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and does not have obvious market value. Moreover many families prefer to present their papers or place them on extended loan in a suitable repository.

The Colonial Records Project, sponsored by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies of Oxford University is organising the preservation of papers of former colonial officials. Most of the collections of papers noted are placed in the Bodleian Library, chiefly in Rhodes House. Hundreds of collections have been deposited, among them a few relating to Australasia and the Pacific Islands, and for this material, apart from the time necessary to catalogue accessions and get them on to the shelves, the problem is not so much copyright as the desire of the owner not to allow reference to private or confidential papers until a reasonable time has elapsed. The project is being prosecuted with speed and energy but the longer we can postpone our description of manuscripts in Rhodes House the more chance is there of including the important papers which are being found.

Such are some of the hazards and obstacles which beset us in the preparation of the 'Guide'. In outlining them I hope I have made it clear that a great deal of help is forthcoming from many sources, here in the British Isles, from Australia and New Zealand and from scholars everywhere. The 'Guide' will not give the student the actual papers provided by documentary publication or photocopying but it should enable us to judge how far publication programmes, the Joint Copying Project and other copying have been able to meet this need. It should also provide, at the date of its publication, notes on all the most important manuscript sources of our history preserved in this country.

- (1) *A Guide to Manuscripts relating to America in Great Britain and Ireland*. Ed. by B. R. Crick ... and M. Alman. Published for the British Association for American Studies by the Oxford University Press, 1961. Introduction, p.xxviii.
- (2) T. C. Skeat, *The Catalogues of the Manuscript Collections in the British Museum*. The British Museum, 1962.
- (3) The U.K. *Copyright Act 1956*. See also G. Sawyer, "Copyright in Letters unpublished at Writer's Death", *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 3, no. 3, November 1966, pp. 27-9.