

Editorial

PETER ROSS ELDERSHAW

(1927-1967)

On 23rd July, 1967, Peter Ross Eldershaw, Principal Archivist of the Archives Office of Tasmania, died at his home at Kingston, near Hobart, at the age of 40 years.

Peter Eldershaw himself once conjectured that archivists were probably the smallest professional group in Australia. It is not surprising, therefore, that his death should be felt as a very sad personal loss amongst his colleagues in Australia. This is not only because of his sterling qualities as an archivist, but also because his friendship meant a great deal to all with whom he was associated in archives work in Australia.

His most outstanding work as an Archivist was his preparation of three very important sections of the *Guide to the Public Records of Tasmania*. While he was Assistant Archivist in the Tasmanian State Archives, he produced the first two of these — the section on the Colonial Secretary's Office records in 1957, and that on the Governor's Office records in 1958. In 1965, after he had become Archives Officer, and just as that office was being re-named Principal Archivist under new legislation passed by the Tasmanian Parliament that year, he produced the third section of the *Guide*, that dealing with Convict Department records.

The introductions to these sections of the *Guide* bear testimony to his great thoroughness as an archivist. Each one of them called for long and tedious research into administrative history, a field in which so little secondary source material is available. In work such as Peter Eldershaw did, the records are both the subject of the finding aid and the means whereby information can be discovered to compile the introductions. The notice these publications attracted in reviews (mostly in overseas journals) was possibly some recompense for the labour expended in their preparation. Peter Walne reviewed sections 1 and 2 in the *American Archivist*¹, L. S. Lake reviewed section 1 and Donald H. Simpson reviewed section 2 in *Archives*², the journal of the British Records Association, H. J. Gibbney reviewed section 1 in *Archives and Manuscripts*³, and section 3 was reviewed by Beatrice F. Davis in the *American Archivist*⁴, by the present writer in *Archives and Manuscripts*⁵, and by A. G. L. Shaw in *Historical Studies, A. & N.Z.*⁶.

One of the less likeable traits frequently exhibited by Australians is the tendency to deprecate anything Australian. This tendency was exhibited in the *Australian Library Journal*⁷ when, in 1966 it (for the first time) deigned to notice in the form of a review any of Peter Eldershaw's publications. The review written in this case damned section 3 of the *Guide* with faint praise, and proceeded to condemn its form and content, primarily, it would seem, because its compiler observed fairly closely the rules drawn up as a result of the 1954 Seminar on Archives Management (conducted in Canberra by Dr T. R. Schellenberg) at which the decision had been taken to produce these *Guides* as part of an over-all *Guide to Pre-Federation Archives* in Australia. The contrast between this review and those written by competent professional archivists in overseas journals is so strange that one almost wonders (as Peter Eldershaw did) whether it was part of

a campaign to belittle the achievements of Australian archivists. The present writer sought to set the record straight in a letter to the Editor of the *Australian Library Journal*⁸ in which section 3 of the *Guide* was examined from the point of view of an archivist, and in relation to the plans agreed upon for the preparation of such guides following on from the 1954 Seminar. Exercising his right of reply, the original reviewer wrote to the Editor of the *Journal*⁹, presumably to defend his original remarks, and in that letter he advanced the view that reviews which bestow praise are ineffective!

Peter Eldershaw's work as Principal Archivist in Tasmania embraced every aspect of the duties of an archivist. Jenkinson has advanced the view that an archivist's duties can be categorized as "moral defence of archives" and "physical defence of archives"¹⁰. Roger Ellis has since suggested¹¹ that this classification is not really valid. One is tempted, however, to think of Peter Eldershaw as the moral defender of the integrity of archives. When he first joined the staff of the Tasmanian State Archives, he applied himself to the study of classical archives keeping. The system of accessioning implemented there, long before he became Principal Archivist, owed more to him than to any other person. He has lucidly described¹² it for us in his article "Accessions procedure in Tasmania". Similarly, the classification of archives in that repository was the brain-child of Peter Eldershaw, and again he has given a clear account of principles and procedures in one of the early issues of this journal¹³. By following his published articles, one can discern the pattern of his thinking and discover the stages by which the best procedures of American and British archivists were applied to the public records of Tasmania. Accessioning, classification and arrangement have been noted. Principles by which the orderly description of the records was undertaken are outlined for us in a paper he prepared for delivery at the 11th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia in Melbourne in 1961¹⁴.

At the same time he was concerned with the protection of the rights of the Crown in respect of public records created by its servants. He communicated this concern in an article written for this journal in December 1962¹⁵, under the title "Security and service; some problems in providing students with materials for research". He also read a paper at the 12th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia held in Hobart in 1963. The title of the paper, "Problems in provenance"¹⁶ gives a fair indication of his thinking at the time, and its main import was that there should be legislation initiated by the Commonwealth Government to prohibit private trafficking in public records. It seems to be the fate of proposals put forward in papers like this that they are greeted enthusiastically at the time of delivery, but that nothing ever happens to implement them. This, unfortunately, has been, up to the moment of writing, the fate of this suggestion.

Peter Eldershaw's considerable experience in matters relating to the recovery of archival estrays, and in archival provision generally, stood him in good stead when he came to tackle the problem of amending Tasmania's archives legislation. In 1963 the Crown lost a case in the Magistrate's Court in Hobart: the objective of the action was to reclaim from private hands certain documents which, it was alleged, were Public Records according to the definitions laid down in the Public Records Act, 1943. The legislation under which the Archives Section operated was thus found

defective. Already the Crown Law Office had ruled that it would have no application interstate. To have it fail in this particular case was sufficient grounds for deciding to replace it. The new legislation, passed in 1965, owes a great deal indeed to Peter Eldershaw, who has given us quite full particulars of the moves that took place before it was agreed to, in an article published in a former issue of this journal¹⁷.

As far as his writing of articles for his professional colleagues was concerned the climax was reached in his paper "Archives and the winds of change", prepared for delivery at the 14th Biennial Conference of the L.A.A. (Brisbane, August 1967). This paper was in a state so nearly complete at the time of his death that it was considered appropriate for it to be read. It advanced quite a few new ideas, building at the same time on things he had said at the 12th Biennial Conference. One of Peter Eldershaw's main contentions was that archives management and records management were one and the same profession. He also advanced the concept of "Total documentation", by which he implied that state archivists should interest themselves in the preservation of non-public records and historical manuscripts as well as in government archives. This was a viewpoint which contrasted sharply with opinions he had expressed in the early part of his professional career¹⁸, and it was a matter of great regret, for this but primarily for all sorts of other reasons, that he was not alive to be able to defend, in discussion and questions, a viewpoint that was not shared by all the audience. His paper on "Archives and the winds of change" will be published in the *Proceedings* of the Conference.

In 1951 a group of people closely associated with the Tasmanian State Archives, some of them staff members, and some of them regular readers, formed the Tasmanian Historical Research Association. Peter Eldershaw was one of this group; he took a leading part in drafting the constitution, and collaborated with the present writer in preparing a paper¹⁹ that was delivered at one of the first meetings. He was elected Editor of the new Association, and continued in this capacity until his death. The regular publication of the Association, the *Papers and Proceedings*, owes so much to his work that it is quite impossible to think of it without thinking of him. He established high standards, in regard to both content and style, and he contributed a worthwhile series of editorials²⁰ to early issues on the public records of Tasmania. Latterly, he wrote for other publications, rather than the publication of which he was editor, but the work of preparing material for the printer was a time-consuming one, and he insisted upon such a high standard in style and form, and upon such commendable criteria as far as content is concerned, that the *Papers and Proceedings* have become second to none amongst the journals of historical societies in Australia.

Other publications of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association owe very much indeed to Peter Eldershaw. He carried out meticulous work on Dr C. Craig's *Engravers of Van Diemen's Land*²¹; on the *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land*²², on Roy Smith's *John Lee Archer*²³, and on the largest and most demanding of all, *Friendly Mission; the Tasmanian journals and papers of George Augustus Robinson*, edited by N. J. B. Plomley²⁴. This latter work is estimated to contain more words than the Bible. The careful checking of the proof against the original manuscript, and the preparation of all sorts of notes and comments were tasks to which Peter Eldershaw

devoted himself, and the beautifully presented end-product owes a great deal to his skill and dedication. Very properly the T.H.R.A. conferred on its Editor the distinction of Honorary Life Membership.

His service to historical research will long be remembered. He became Archives Officer in 1960, and since that date (and to some extent since 1951, when he was first appointed to the staff of the Tasmanian State Archives) there has scarcely been one piece of historical research relating to Tasmania that does not owe much to Peter Eldershaw. He served on the Tasmanian Committee for the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, and every article of Tasmanian interest was submitted to him for his scrutiny.

For his distinguished contribution to the archival profession and to the advancement of archival knowledge in Australia, he was offered a foundation Fellowship of the Library Association of Australia when that body was granted a Royal Charter of Incorporation in 1963. He accepted this offer, and was prepared to accept too the responsibilities that go with professional membership of the Library Association of Australia. As an instance of this, he agreed to be an examiner in one of the Archives subjects of the L.A.A. syllabus in 1964, and served in that capacity until his death. The syllabus for papers 14, 15 and 16 was, to a large extent, based on his ideas, and he gave to this matter the same careful thought that had characterized all his contributions to archival theory and practice.

He was in 1966/67 asked to join the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services. This Council had been established with institutional membership only, but proposals to revise its composition were adopted in 1966, and by these it was agreed that four municipal or "public" librarians, two special librarians (apart from the Chief Librarian of C.S.I.R.O.) one person representing the school library field, one person representing the non-university institutions of tertiary education, and one archivist should be invited to join the Council²⁵. Peter Eldershaw was the archivist chosen. It is most regrettable that he did not live long enough actually to attend an A.A.C.O.B.S. meeting.

Many suggestions have been made for the formulation of some sort of memorial to Peter Eldershaw. The present issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* is designed in some small way to commemorate his life and to acknowledge his great contribution to our profession. The Annual Meeting of the Section held in Brisbane during the recent Conference resolved that the proposal for a memorial should be referred to the Committee of the Section. This does not preclude the making of suggestions by any member of the Section. The Secretary is Mr J. L. Cleland, c/- the Manuscripts Branch, National Library of Australia, Kingston, A.C.T. 2604.

If we have been slow to take an initiative in this matter, at least the same cannot be said of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, for that Association has already announced the establishment of a Peter Eldershaw Memorial Fund, about which the Editor has been authorized to give publicity in this issue. The T.H.R.A. has not yet decided to what project the proceeds of the Fund will be devoted. However, a memorial issue of the *Papers and Proceedings* will be issued towards the end of 1967 or early in 1968, and the Editor understands that this will include a reprinting of the Introductions to the three sections of the *Guide to the Public Records of Tasmania*, and a bibliography of

Peter's writings, to be prepared by Dr O. M. Roe of the History Department, University of Tasmania. It is understood, however, that the Memorial Fund will not be devoted to that special issue (of what is, after all, a regular publication) but to some other project, either the financing of a memorial lecture or the publication of a Tasmanian public record, or some similar venture.

Peter Eldershaw was an archivist, rather than a historian. He made significant contributions to the study of history, as all good archivists do. But it appears to the present Editor that archivists in Australia could well show the esteem and high regard in which he was held by producing something which could be regarded as a fitting tribute to their deceased friend and colleague. Whether the Section does this, or whether it is left to an *ad hoc* group of archivists, historians and research workers, will probably depend on the reaction of individual members of the Archives Section. If members feel sufficiently strongly about this, will they write to the Secretary of the Section, as suggested above?

REFERENCES

1. *American Archivist*, XXIII (Jan 1960), 73-74.
2. *Archives*, III (Michaelmas 1958), 260-1. *Archives*, IV (Michaelmas 1960), 247.
3. *Archives and Manuscripts*, I (Aug 1957), 35-36.
4. *American Archivist*, XXIX (Jan 1966), 93.
5. *Archives and Manuscripts*, II (May 1965), 32-33.
6. *Historical Studies*, XII (1965), 136-137.
7. *Australian Library Journal*, XV (Apr 1966), 66-67. Review by A. C. Courtice.
8. *ibid.*, XV (June 1966), 107-109.
9. *ibid.*, XV (Aug 1966), 144.
10. H. Jenkinson.—*A manual of archive administration*. Rev. ed. (re-issue), 1965 pp 44-123.
11. *ibid.* Roger H. Ellis's introduction to the re-issue, p. xi.
12. *Bulletin for Australian Archivists*, 1954.
13. *Archives and Manuscripts*, I (June 1956), 1-4.
14. *Library Resources for the Nation*, Conference Committee, 11th Biennial Conference, L.A.A. Melb., 1961, pp 57-60.
15. *Archives and Manuscripts*, II (Dec 1962), 11-13.
16. *Impact*; addresses and papers read before the 12th Biennial Conference at Hobart, Tas., 1963. Section X.
17. *Archives and Manuscripts*, III (May 1967), 5-10.
18. *Papers and Proceedings of the T.H.R.A.*, II (June 1953), 64.
19. *ibid.*, 1951: No. 1 (Sep 1951), 3 +
20. *ibid.*, II and III (June, Aug, Oct 1953, Apr-Aug 1954), pp. 63-5, 81-2, 105-6 of vol. II, and 19, 35, 55 and 71 of vol. III.
21. Dr Craig's book was published in 1961 in a limited edition of 1000 copies.
22. The *Journals* were edited by Anne McKay, with an introduction by P. R. Eldershaw, and published by the University of Tasmania in conjunction with the T.H.R.A., 1962.
23. *John Lee Archer; Tasmanian Architect and Engineer*, published in 1962. Peter Eldershaw was thanked for help in originally encouraging the publication, searching the records for details of Archer's career, taking photographs used to illustrate it, and providing help in many other ways.
24. N. J. B. Plomley's work was published in 1966.
25. One parliamentary librarian had been added to the membership of A.A.C.O.B.S. a year earlier.