3. A course in the history of accountancy has been offered for some years in the Faculties of Economics in the Universities of Rome and Florence, Italy, where a great mass of archival material has long supported sustained research into the development of accountancy.
4. For example, the journal of the Chartered Institute of Accountants, *The Chartered Accountant in Australia,* recently has published in two successive issues (February and March, 1969) articles by the writer on the history of accountancy.
5. The Datini Archives are located in Prato, near Florence, Italy. Datini was a highly successful merchant, industrialist and banker who controlled a vast business complex extending throughout Europe and the East between 1350-1410.
6. Federigo Melis—*Aspetti della Vita Economica Mediovale,* Siena, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 1962, p. 45.
7. Iris Origo—*The Merchant of Prato,* London, Jonathan Cape, 1957.
8. Federigo Melis—*A Proposito dell'una Nuova Volume,* Milan, A. Guiffre, 1959; after which Origo brought out a revised edition of her biography of Datini, published by Peregrine Books in 1963.
9. Most of the records relating to the period 1364-1382 are missing; but those from 1382-1410 are practically complete in all aspects.
10. F. E. Moore and H. F. Stettler—*Accounting Systems for Management Control,* Illinois, Irwin, 1963, p. 171.

JAMES BONWICK, "ARCHIVIST OF NEW SOUTH WALES"

by R. F. DOUST

Senior Archivist, Archives Authority of N.S.W.

The history of the establishment of a government archives in New South Wales is in large measure and for twenty years, the story of one man, James Bonwick, Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, schoolmaster, novelist, historian, and eventually copyist extraordinary.

Bonwick was born in London on 8 July 1817, of parents of good yeoman stock but in circumstances which, if falling short of poverty, suggest that life was never easy. Eighty years later Bonwick wrote

> Candour requires that I chronicle the fact of my not being born with the proverbial silver spoon, and that I have had, under many difficulties, to blunder my way through the dangers, sorrows and seductions of a considerable length of days.[1]

Earlier Bonwicks, he said, had been not only yeoman farmers, but also scholars and churchmen. Two were Headmasters of the Merchant Taylors' School. But James's own father was a victim of the economic upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars, and became a carpenter[2]. Bonwick was in his way something of a social snob, although it would be grossly unfair to suggest that he was in any way an intellectual snob; it is rather typical that he writes of his father's "profession, or trade, once honoured by Jesus of Nazareth" on the same page of his published reminiscences as he remarks that his "racial pride is gratified" by his scholastic ancestors[3].

He never achieved fame or riches, despite an impressive list of published works[4]. There are reasonable grounds for believing that it was poverty and ill-fortune as much as the desire to serve scholarship which led him to embark on the various copying projects from sources in London and elsewhere; yet it is for this that Australian archivists and historians will remember him.

> As, from my losses in Colonial investments, and from heavy family claims, it was needful to apply myself to some regular employment, I resolved upon archivistic engagement.[5]

In 1841 Bonwick, schoolmaster of seven or eight years standing, Dissenter, proclaimed total abstainer and temperance worker, and husband of a few months, sailed for Van Diemen's Land to take charge of government schools in Hobart. He was then only twenty four years of age: he remained in Hobart eight years, publishing during that time his first full-length book, *Geography for the use of young Australians,* (Hobart, 1845).

His eight years of schoolmastering in Hobart were followed by three in South Australia and then twenty in Victoria, including four years as Inspector of Denominational Schools for the Western District of Victoria at Ballarat. His educational work was interrupted for a time by sunstroke and ensuing partial paralysis, and later, between 1863 and 1870, he conducted a school of his own at St. Kilda[6].

Bonwick's published works to 1870 number over thirty, ranging through religious tracts, temperance pamphlets, school-books, egyptology, to colonial history. Although none brought him fortune nor fame, the serious historical works seem to have been on the whole favourably reviewed.

The school at St. Kilda, after several years of prosperity, finally proved to be a financial failure; this was due to mismanagement while he was on a visit (his second) to England, and after the sale of the school in 1870 Bonwick, aged 53, salvaged what he could and returned to England. There "thanks to providence and renewed power", he "was able to weather the storm in fresh employment"[7]. He did return, but as a visiting Englishman, not a resident of Australia; yet it was in England from about 1884 onwards that he made his real and lasting contribution to Australia.

> After my return from my last trip to the Antipodes, about 1884, and when I had finished a short series of lectures upon Queensland, I was much impressed about the necessity of Colonial Governments undertaking the gathering of materials for their own individual Country's History. Having written so much about Colonial History, from materials rudely gathered in Australia, I saw the opportunity of doing greater things through the more extended means afforded by the State Record Office of London, in Chancery Lane.
>
> . . . I found well cared for and fairly catalogued, a vast amount of correspondence between our own rulers, and with people not only of our own race, but with those of various foreign nations. The Colonial portion was rich . . .[8]

How Bonwick managed to sell to the Queensland Government, his first customer, his idea of making transcripts of documents in the Public Record Office and in the Colonial Office which related to that Colony's early history, is not clear. He says himself only that at first he "was engaged upon the records pertaining to the most recent of the Australian — Queensland, through the good offices of the Agent General — . . ."[9]. Nonetheless, whether by his sheer enthusiasm, or from sympathy of officials in high places for a sick man with many mouths to feed, or

because of his reputation as a writer of published if not financially successful histories, Bonwick had started on a new career which was to extend over the next twenty-five years. For here was a man with some vision, some feeling for the materials of history. This man, in ill health and with one arm paralysed and useless, this ex-schoolmaster with five children (two of them in adult life still partly dependent on their father), only this man in all the Australian colonies saw that before Colonial historians could work in their own country, they would have to have access to official documents of all kinds which were in Whitehall and in the Public Record Office.

In fact, not much Australian history of a serious and scholarly kind had been written. Australia was a young country, too busy for reflection and for taking stock of itself, and for that matter, had yet no tradition of scholarship among its own people to draw on. The earliest colonists were far too busy winning the battle against their own environment to have much time for culture; the newer arrivals of the forties and fifties were too busy making money; the convict portion of the population, large to begin with and still a significant proportion of the total by mid-century, was not in general composed of men or women of letters; and the cultured few, John Dunmore Lang and William Charles Wentworth and others, were too busy engaging in argument to indulge in scholarship.

Furthermore, while at least some of the raw materials of history were available within the colonies (if they had been recognised as such), many more were only available in London. And 'available' is in this context questionable, for the transfer of Colonial Office papers to the Public Record Office does not appear to have been commenced before 1852[10], and the likelihood of gaining access to them while still in departmental custody would have been remote for private research workers.

In New South Wales popular interest in the origins of the Colony was slow to develop. The fiftieth anniversary, in 1838, turned out to be a damp squib.

> All the Government and other public offices, and the greater portion of the shops were closed. A regatta was got up for the occasion, and notwithstanding the apathy that had been displayed by the public, it went off remarkably well.[11]

The whole of this newspaper report occupies only about nine column inches, and seems itself an indication of the public apathy to which it refers.

The seventy-fifth anniversary fared little better, although the attendance at the now traditional regatta, on a day of dull drizzling rain, was improved. The Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, however, felt that the history of the Colony was only then beginning:

> The future historian of Australia will pass hurriedly over the earlier period . . . and will recognize as commencing the real history of the country, the date at which the privilege of self-government was conceded.[12]

There was no realization of the interest which was later to be taken in the origin of it all: the early colonial, non-selfgoverning period, the cradle years of the nation, were not yet thought of as important.

It was the approach of the centenary of the first settlement of N.S.W. in 1888 which helped to crystallize private and official thinking about official history, leading to the publication of *The History of New South Wales from the Records* (Sydney, Government Printer, 1889-94).

The Government of New South Wales had found itself becoming involved in matters historical almost by accident and even perhaps against its will early in 1884, when it consented to the purchase of the "Brabourne Papers". Lord Brabourne may or may not have had an appreciation of the value as historical documents of the papers which had passed down to him through his family (his grandfather and Sir Joseph Banks had married sisters)[13], but he had a very clear idea that they were worth money. The papers relating to New South Wales included autograph letters of Banks, Flinders, Bligh and others; he therefore offered them to Sir Saul Samuel, Agent-General for New South Wales in London. Sir Saul recognized their value, but could not or would not fix a price: instead, he arranged for them to be inspected by Bonwick, and on Bonwick's advice he offered Lord Brabourne £150. Bonwick may have undervalued the Brabourne Papers at £150 in the knowledge that the New South Wales Government was unlikely to be sufficiently interested to pay a higher price. Brabourne, although remarking that he had been advised that they were worth £300, quite readily agreed to accept £150: in 1884 there would have been no other buyer. In the long run the price was agreed on at £375 upon the discovery of a much greater quantity of material[14].

Before the despatch of the documents to Sydney, Samuel employed Bonwick to list and briefly describe them. Bonwick's list and descriptions were printed, although apparently only for internal official use[15]. This rather sketchy calendar of the Brabourne Papers appears to have been the first work of an archival nature which Bonwick performed for the New South Wales Government.

It was not, of course, the first contract he had had with either the official archives of the Australian colonies or with other historical documents, and what he had seen, both in the Public Record Office in London, and in Australia, had impressed him by the wealth of valuable material available and had appalled him by its neglect. Addressing the Royal Colonial Institute in London in 1895, he told "curious stories of shameful negligence in the preservation of official documents here and in the Colonies"[16].

Bonwick had up to this time been a historian — a *user* of documents — rather than an archivist — a *preserver* of them. He had used them, notably in the *Settlement of Port Phillip* (1883) and in *The First Twenty Years of Australia: a history founded on official documents* (1882). In the preface to this last-named, writing of the New South Wales Colonial Secretary's Office "nearly twenty five years ago", that is about 1860, he complained, with good reason

> All these precious manuscripts were extracted, in the writer's presence, from a heap of rubbish and old documents, laden with the undisturbed dust of many years.[17]

Bonwick's interest in the preservation of the records themselves, then, probably dates from the 1860s or a little earlier. He was to pursue this theme for the rest of his life, although, having failed in his attempts

to have a Record Office established in New South Wales or in any other of the Colonies, he concentrated his energies on the transcription of documents at the London end.

Whether he would have been more influential in urging the establishment of official archives offices in Australia had he been more often on the spot instead of writing from London is a matter for conjecture. His health, however, forced him to remain mostly in the cooler English climate, and neither occasional visits to the country of his adoption nor frequent written assaults made much impression. He turned therefore to his other love, the copying of those documents in England which had a bearing on the early history of Australia. These were mainly in the Public Record Office, the Colonial Office Library, and the British Museum, but included as well "the archives of the several Missionary Institutions and the Catholic Westminster archives at the Oratory"[18].

In Bonwick's plans for copying, his champion in New South Wales was Sir Henry Parkes, Premier from time to time between 1872 and 1891. Bonwick made his first approach to the New South Wales Government in 1884, without much success. It may have been the purchase of the Brabourne Papers (which he had been employed to value) which prompted Bonwick's approach. When this came to nothing, Bonwick did not give up easily.

> Sir Saul tells me that your government does not want the copy of early documents at the State Record Office. But there are at the British Museum some interesting things worthy of transcription for the Library in Sydney.[19]

Bonwick, at 67 years of age, "now in old age with my arm partly paralyzed", and short of money was turning to the only thing he knew about apart from schoolmastering — the gathering of the raw materials of history.

He tried again in May of the following year, 1885, with an official application to act, if only in a modest fashion, as archivist of New South Wales, as is shown by a private letter to Parkes dated 8 May 1885:

> By this mail is sent an application to the Colonial Secretary at Sydney, for permission to act as the Archivist of your Colony to a small extent. Knowing from Sir Saul, who has little interest in literary matters, that the Govt. may need a friend to literature to support my claim, I ask your service. Objections to a general transcription of early records I can understand, as family names & stories may appear; so I seek *only* to make for your Public Library a *list* of all the documents in the Record Office here, from 1786, and a short *Digest* of their contents.[20]

Unfortunately, before Parkes had time to act on the application he was out of office as Premier, and Bonwick's application was not finally approved until 13 March 1888[21]. With the confirmation of his appointment, however, Bonwick was able to go ahead with his New South Wales transcripts. His plan was far-reaching: writing to Parkes in September 1888 he says that he is "anxious that your Record Office should have copies of all important documents up to — say — 1830 . . ."[22]. Bonwick had already outlined his plan in an earlier letter to Parkes:

> It was as the historian, & not the copyist, that I sought to select from the old records of our Colony. I would copy the most important, make a digest of others, and give a collective report of the whole as the Archivist[23].

And in a letter of 1887, also to Parkes, he had set out in some detail the nature of the copying which he had proposed:

> Excuse my writing so soon after my last note, but today, in search of documents to fulfil the order from the Tasmanian Government, I came across such interesting matters in connection with the earliest days of Sydney that I could not help again asking your Ministry to allow me to transcribe such.
>
> If only £50 order be given, I would only take *letters,* bearing on the History, to be had in the Public Record Office, the British Museum, & Admiralty, carefully avoiding reference to any names which may occasion uneasiness to descendants.
>
> Documents affecting [?] prices, the first free settlers, the first exploration (not printed), descriptions of the country in 'private' letters, & Captain's letters, are sufficiently numerous and interesting to engage time.
>
> There are in the Museum some curious old charts of the coast very well worth copying.
>
> If you please to sanction the transcription of dispatches from the Colonial Office, & such early dispatches from Sydney & Norfolk Island as you may not have in copy at Sydney, I can add that to my work.
>
> When I have completed the first fifty pound order from Tasmania, I could soon commence upon one from New South Wales.
>
> Governor Broome has just sent me a private letter intimating that after a little time he hopes to send a request for transcriptions of Western Australian documents.[24]

Bonwick, having engaged in commissions for the Governments of Tasmania and Queensland and being about to embark on one for Western Australia, was by then more than a novice in seeking out and transcribing documents. Perhaps Parkes was shrewd enough to see that for his £50 he would get a bargain.

Bonwick's approach was selective: there is no doubt that he still considered himself a historian, capable of selecting documents of interest and importance. This is not what we now understand to be the approach of the archivist, who leaves the task of selection and interpretation to the users of his archives, but in this Bonwick only reflected a quite general attitude of the time, quite apart from the fact that his resources of time and manpower were limited.

Historical Records of New South Wales was very largely compiled from Bonwick's transcripts. In the preface of Volume I, Alexander Britten, the compiler and editor, wrote

> But for the active search made in London by Mr J. Bonwick, F.R.G.S., the early records of New South Wales would have been little better than a blank . . .
>
> the transcripts that have been made repair, so far as can be repaired, the loss of early Colonial records.[25]

The later *Historical Records of Australia* likewise drew heavily on Bonwick's work. Scholars everywhere have cause to bless Bonwick's transcripts, without which much historical research would be severely hampered. But it is more difficult to assess his contribution to the development of Australian official archives. Certainly nothing much happened in New South Wales for many years: the Archives Office of New South Wales was not established by legislation until 1960, although an attempt at about the time of the First World War almost succeeded, and much useful work was done in the Mitchell Library between the Wars.

Perhaps what Bonwick really achieved was the creation of a climate of opinion favourable to the idea of preserving official documents as sources for historical research: it would have been too much at this time to expect an awareness of the continuing importance of archives by the offices which had created them. But a start had to be made somewhere: it was made by Bonwick, and if his major tangible achievement was in copying records in other places rather than succeeding in having an archives office established in Sydney, it was nevertheless of real importance in an almost painfully slow progress towards proper provision for official archives, not only in New South Wales but in the whole of Australia.

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