

BOOK REVIEWS

New South Wales. Archives Authority. *Guide to the convict records in the Archives Office of New South Wales*. Sydney, the Authority, 1970.

This is number 14 in the series of *Guides* to the State Archives of New South Wales, and was prepared by Mrs Dawn Troy, B.A., Dip. Lib. It differs from similar publications in being a *subject* guide, not attempting to list the series of records from any one office, but taking instead a list of 96 subject headings and describing the records relevant to each one. For example, under the heading "Assignment and Employment of Convicts", thirty-six series of records are listed, with a few lines about each, including covering dates and location numbers; but no indication is given of which office created the records unless this is an essential part of the description. The administrative framework of the convict system is not, however, ignored, as the work opens with an outline of the statutes relating to transportation and notes on the functions of about twenty public offices which created archives about the convict system.

In a work of this kind a great deal depends on the comprehensiveness of the subject headings. The *Guide* has, I think, managed to cover most aspects of convict life from ships, through gaols and medical establishments (by name) and penal settlements (also named separately) to details of daily life, such as corporal punishment, families, marriages, pardons, passports, rations, road gangs, supplies and tickets-of-leave. The series listed under each heading vary from fifty-six in the case of "Colonial Trials and Court Records" to two under "Clothing".

There are also nineteen appendices. These, in fact, make up the largest portion of the book, being 211 out of the total 307 pages. These contain more detailed descriptions of some series, e.g. page numbering of musters and other papers relating to convict ships; shelf lists of copies of conditional pardons; a chronological list of convict ships arriving at Port Jackson; and a guide (Appendix S) to the convict records on microfilm in the Mitchell Library, which are copies of records held by the Public Record Office, London. (This appendix has its own subject guide and contains descriptions of over two hundred reels of microfilm). Despite the usefulness of the appendices, the main value of the *Guide* is in the subject headings and their accompanying series. These should prove tremendously informative for the researcher with specific aspects of a topic in mind, to whom the usual guides are a blur of extraneous matter organised on administrative lines with which he may not be familiar.

The nature of the work compels comparison with the 1965 publication by P.R. Eldershaw *Convict Department Record Group* (Section three of the "Guide to the public records of Tasmania"). The Tasmanian work also broke away from the departmental framework, but its twelve headings are a classification of the records themselves (e.g. correspondence, assignment lists, conduct registers) rather than true subject headings. Both *Guides* have shipping lists in the appendices. The

Tasmanian (Appendix 2) shows the date of arrival and name of the vessel, and the number of transportees on board; the N.S.W. Appendix A gives the date of arrival, name of vessel, master's name, the date and place of embarkation, reference numbers for both volume and microfilm and whether there are other papers connected with the ship (e.g. master's or surgeon-superintendent's journals) which are then listed as separate appendices.

The Guide to Convict Records is clearly printed (large type, in near-print) and well laid out. Its only fault is the binding (with staples) which does not permit the book to open out properly: note-taking from the appendix section, especially, requires accurate positioning of all available arms and elbows.

D. Wheeler

Brooks, Philip C. *Research in archives*. U. of Chicago press, 1969.

This book was intended as a manual for young scholars using archives. Although it is clearly aimed at American students and historians, with examples based on American institutions, it is important reading for Australian users of archives, since there is little else available for them in this country. As a guide to users it concentrates on explaining terms, facilities, obligations, prohibitions – the sort of thing that archivists do cursorily as they accompany the user to the stacks, or that users find out as their research progresses.

The book opens with a description of different kinds of unpublished sources: the distinctions between such terms as “private papers”, “historical manuscripts”, “archives”, “public records”. These are mainly working definitions; Brooks makes no attempt to sustain scholarly arguments about the differences between historical manuscripts and archives. He follows Ernst Posner’s definition that historical manuscripts are unorganized papers whereas archives have organic unity.

He describes the kinds of institutions which collect records, and the different kinds of finding aids and for whom they are most useful. While short explanations are given as to the purposes of indexes, calendars and registers, Brooks does not mention the series list, which at least one Australian archivist regards as being more useful, both for archivist and researcher, than any other finding aid.

There is a salutary chapter on obligations of both users and archivists. The archivist is expected to produce material and suggest further sources of information (both in his own institution and others) to explain the filing scheme and arrangement of papers, to keep finding aids up to date, and also to explain something of the mysteries of provenance. The user is expected to find out from published sources the general outline of events he is studying, biographical details, structures of organizations. He is also expected not to steal, mis-file, mislay, misquote from or disfigure documents.

Limitations on access are discussed. This has more relation to the American scene, but certain general principles are comparable - e.g. for “classified” army and defence documents, and personal papers. It is interesting to note that the U.S. Department of Defence has an automatic downgrading of documents (from “top secret”, to “secret”, to “confidential”) every three years. The authorization to do this, however, does not guarantee that holders of copies of the documents will change the security markings accordingly. Foreign relations papers of the State Department are in general open after 30 years.

The chapter on note-taking applies specifically to note-taking from archives, and therefore includes advice not usually offered to students.

“It is important that (the student) record just what groups he looked at, how thoroughly he examined them, what further materials he would have studied if he

had had more time, ... the chronological scope and arrangement of the materials should be noted, and the researcher should indicate whether he checked all of a group or only a part of it ... some general indication of those series which proved irrelevant or useless is helpful ...”

This is sound advice, obvious perhaps to the experienced researcher, but certainly valuable to a student entering an archives for the first time.

The final chapter in *Research in archives* is devoted to mechanical means of creating records – not only photocopying, tape-recording and microfilming, with which most archivists are familiar, but also electronic data-processing techniques. Brooks discusses how these affect the researcher:–

- (i) improved finding aids for existing records (e.g. the preparation of indexes by the use of punched cards; even inter-institutional indexing);
- (ii) new means of compiling data and evaluating historical sources (an increase in quantitative studies of demographic, voting, economic patterns);
- (iii) the creation of entirely new forms of records.

It seems certain that (i) will be of undoubted value to scholars; (ii) will, by de-personalizing history, lead to problems in historical causation which the scholar himself must settle; and (iii) is a sure headache for archivists. If an increasing number of governments and businesses conduct their activities with the aid of computers, new forms of “records”, unreadable by the human eye and the use of the alphabet, will be developed. How will these affect archival processing and accessioning methods? Will punched cards and magnetic tapes be assimilated by archival principles as maps, recordings, microfilm and photographs have been? Does coding and programming destroy the traditional concept of provenance? And what of practical problems such as the preservation of this type of material, and the repair and obsolescence of expensive and complex machines? Since this is a manual for users, the writer tactfully refrains from answering these questions. But the thought provoked might lead to a re-appraisal of some cherished methods.

Research in archives is written in a lucid and informal style. It has a four-page bibliography covering each chapter separately, and an index. The total number of pages of text is 114. Good value for the time it takes to read.

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