

THE ORIGINS OF THE AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT

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Twenty five years ago the Commonwealth National Library and the Mitchell Library agreed to microfilm all the documents in the Public Record Office in London relating to Australia. At the same time it was decided that the two libraries should co-operate in the filming of records in archives, libraries, societies and in private possession throughout the British Isles, and ultimately in Europe, although priority would be given to the Public Record Office material. The geographical coverage of the Australian Joint Copying Project, as it came to be called, was later extended to take in New Zealand, the Pacific, Antarctica, and part of South East Asia. The Project, which is likely to continue for many more decades, has produced over 4,600 reels of film, that is, over five million pages of manuscripts, and partial or complete sets of the film have been acquired by libraries in New Zealand, Fiji, and Hawaii, as well as in every State of Australia.

The Project has operated in a period of radical change in Australian historiography, at both its academic and popular levels. In the universities Australian history is no longer regarded as a minor appendage of imperial history but as a subject in its own right, studied by large numbers of undergraduates and the concern of many of the teaching staff and postgraduate students in the history departments. Far more scholarly books on Australian history have appeared in the post-war years than ever before. The leading journal in the field, *Historical Studies*, commenced publication in 1940 and other professional journals have appeared in recent years. Some of the most influential social scientists, particularly political scientists, have used an historical approach in their writings. The professionalization of Australian historiography has been accompanied by a greater popular interest in history, evident in the proliferation of historical societies since 1945 and the publication of numerous biographies and local histories.¹

The Joint Copying Project has played an important role in the burgeoning of Australian historical scholarship. From 1788 to 1855 voluminous records were created in Britain relating to almost every conceivable aspect of the life of the Australian colonies and detailed records created in Australia were also despatched regularly to Britain and preserved in departments and archives in London. In addition, the close relations between Australia and Britain from 1855 to the present day have meant that there are extensive British records relating to every period of Australian history. The material filmed by the Project therefore constitutes the indispensable primary sources for historians of early Australia, and also important sources for historians of Australian politics, defence, foreign policy, trade and immigration in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before 1945 these records were occasionally used by Australians who had the means and the time to work for lengthy periods in London. The Project has now made them readily available to students throughout Australia and its impact can be seen in the greatly increased output of scholarly historical writings, particularly in the form of theses and periodical articles.

1. See J.M. Ward. *Historiography*, in A.L. McLeod, ed. The Pattern of Australian culture. (Ithaca, Cornell U.P., 1963)

While the film produced by the Project has made a valuable contribution to Australian historical studies, the successful operation of the Project for over twenty years has made it a notable example of library co-operation. These two considerations suggest that a study of the origins of the Project might be worthwhile. In particular, it might be useful to examine the influences that caused governments and their libraries to accept responsibility for the collection of historical records; the attempts, by libraries, to make the records more accessible to scholars; and finally the events that led up to the commencement of the Project itself.

Many of Australia's early historians, from Tench and Collins in the 1790s to Parkes and Gavan Duffy in the 1890s, were active participants in the events that they described and the value of their works lies in their first-hand accounts of the early days of the colonies rather than in any claims to objectivity. After 1850, however, a growing number of writers produced works based on various kinds of written sources, as well as on their memories and experiences. With a few exceptions, these writers were chroniclers rather than analytical historians, but they were the first to draw attention to the existence of official records documenting Australian history in considerable detail from the time of the first discoveries and settlement. Some of them, such as F.P. Labilliere, J.H. Heaton, J. Bonwick and G.W. Rudsen, returned to Britain in the 1870s and used and publicised documents in the Public Record Office and the Colonial Office in London.² Rudsen, for instance, stated in the preface to his *History of Australia* (1883): 'The following pages show what valuable treasures have hitherto been neglected or unknown, and how in their absence false notions have been entertained.'³

Heaton and Bonwick were the first to put forward the idea that the colonial governments should assume responsibility for the copying of these official records. In 1882, in a letter to Sir Henry Parkes, Heaton called on the New South Wales Government to appoint a 'Commission of learned gentlemen ... to obtain copies from English and European governments of records relating to the discovery of Australia'.⁴ James Bonwick (1817-1906), a prolific writer who had been a schoolmaster in Tasmania and Victoria,⁵ was more persistent and ultimately more successful. He was acquainted with the Canadian archivist who, since 1872, had been transcribing English manuscripts relating to Canada and felt that he could perform a similar service for Australia. In his *Port Phillip settlement* (1883) he referred to 'the stores of wealth awaiting research in London' and suggested that 'faithful copies of such interesting documents should be in the public libraries of the colonial capitals'.⁶ In the years 1883-86 Bonwick secured commissions from the

2. See F.P. Labilliere, *Early history of the colony of Victoria*. 2v. (Lond., Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1878); J.H. Heaton, *Australian dictionary of dates and men of the time*. (Lond., S.W. Silver, 1879); J. Bonwick, *First twenty years of Australia*. (Lond., Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882); *Port Phillip settlement*. (Lond., Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1883); G.W. Rudsen. *History of Australia*. 3v. (Lond., Chapman and Hall, 1883).
3. Rudsen., *op cit.*, v.1, p. vi.
4. J.H. Heaton to Sir Henry Parkes, 28 March 1882. ML MSS A888.
5. See J. Bonwick. *An octogenarian's reminiscences*. (London, Nichols, 1902); G. Featherstone. *The Life and times of James Bonwick*. (M.A. thesis, Uni. of Melb., 1968); R.F. Doust, James Bonwick, "Archivist of New South Wales", *Archives and Manuscripts*, v. 3 (May 1969) pp. 9-15.
6. Bonwick. *Port Phillip settlement* p. iv.

Queensland, South Australian and Victorian governments to transcribe official records of the early settlement of these colonies. It was the New South Wales records that naturally most excited him and he repeatedly wrote to Parkes seeking an appointment as government archivist. In May 1885 he stated, 'I seek only to make for your Public Library a list of all documents in the Record Office here, from 1786, and a short Digest of their contents'.⁷ With an optimism that others were to share in subsequent projects he predicted, 'If I confine myself in the first instance, say, up to the year 1830, many weeks would not be required'. In September 1886 he renewed his proposal, referring to the valuable records in the British Museum, Public Record Office, Admiralty and libraries in Paris.⁸

While Bonwick was urging Parkes to give his support to the collection of historical records the idea of an official history of New South Wales was being put forward by an influential public servant. In 1883 Thomas Richards, the Government Printer, published *An epitome of the official history of New South Wales*, a dull chronicle based mainly on printed sources. With the approach of the centenary of the first settlement in the colony his successor, Charles Potter, proposed that a new edition be issued based on a wider range of material, including the Banks Papers recently purchased by the Government from Baron Brabourne. In April 1887 Parkes decided that the Government should collect the early records of the colony and also that an official centenary history should be compiled. Bonwick was instructed to transcribe documents in London dealing with the foundation of the colony, for which he was to be paid £50, while G.B. Barton, a journalist and lawyer and brother of the politician, was appointed editor of the official history.

Bonwick found that he had only copied the papers of 1788-89 by the time the £50 was spent, and he appealed to Parkes to renew the commission.⁹ Parkes' enthusiasm was aroused by an examination of the transcripts and he decided that the work should not cease with the centenary celebrations but should be a continuing project. In fact, Bonwick was employed by the Government for 15 years, only resigning in 1902 because of failing eyesight, although throughout the 1890s he was worried that his services might be abruptly terminated.¹⁰ For much of this time he was also employed by the Tasmanian Government transcribing documents on the early history of Tasmania. He was engaged full-time on these projects and he and his assistant made 125,000 sheets of transcripts.

Bonwick copied documents in the Public Record Office, Colonial Office, War Office, Admiralty, India Office, Privy Council Office, Somerset House and the British Museum, and he searched the holdings of many private organisations, such as the various missionary societies. He visited repositories in Dublin, Edinburgh, Bristol and Portsmouth, and Lord Percy, Sir Evan Nepean and other individuals lent him papers.¹¹ Newspaper and periodical articles were transcribed, as well as manuscript material. This material included explorers' journals covering the period 1641-1892, but most of the documents dated from the years 1780-1830.

7. Bonwick to Parkes, 8 May 1885. ML MSS A872.

8. Bonwick to Sir Saul Samuel, 8 Sept., 1886. ML MSS 152.

9. Bonwick to Parkes, 15 June 1888. ML MSS A872.

10. Bonwick to G.B. Barton, 20 Feb., 1890, 9 Aug., 1894, 26 Feb., 1897. DL MS Q102.

11. Bonwick to Barton, 9 Aug., 1894. DL MS Q102.

The transcripts were selective. Colonial Office officials prevented Bonwick from copying certain documents. ¹² For instance, four folios of the evidence of the Bigge Report (1822) were destroyed because of their personal comments and much of the evidence was copied only on condition that it was not made available to the public. ¹³ Bonwick himself stressed the need for discretion, out of consideration for the feelings of descendants, and stated, 'There is a careful omission of all names of prisoners, private slanders and irrelevant facts'. ¹⁴ In any case, he saw himself as a historian rather than a 'copyist' and rejected the idea of exhaustively copying every item relating to Australia. In support of this approach he could cite his instructions, which were to copy whatsoever might be of service to the official history. ¹⁵

At the time G.B. Barton was critical of the fact that students in Australia had to rely on Bonwick's judgment of the relative significance of different documents ¹⁶ and criticism in more recent years has focused on the selective nature of the transcripts. Nevertheless, they remain a monumental work and, although now superseded by the Joint Copying Project microfilm, they provided the source material, either directly or indirectly, for three generations of Australian historians.

In 1889 Barton had completed the first volume of the *Official history of New South Wales from the records*, covering the period 1783-89. In addition to the transcripts made by Bonwick, he made use of records in the Colonial Secretary's Office in Sydney, the Banks Papers in the Free Public Library, ¹⁷ and the King Papers in the possession of the King family. Barton prepared a considerable amount of material for a second volume, but his contract was not renewed on the grounds that he had failed to complete the volume within six months. ¹⁸ Another journalist, Alexander Britton, was appointed as the new editor and at the same time the Government set up a History Board, which included G.A. Wood, who had just become Professor of History at Sydney University, and R.C. Walker, the Principal Librarian of the Free Public Library. The Board recommended that the Government undertake the publication of the historical records of the colony, to complement the official history. The Government adopted this proposal and in 1892 the first volume of the *Historical records of New South Wales* was published, with Britton as editor. A few months later Britton died and the compilation of the second volume of the official history was completed by F.M. Bladen, who also edited all subsequent volumes of the *Records*.

Frank M. Bladen (1858-1912) was a man of many talents. He had begun his career as a map compiler in the Sydney Observatory. In 1886 he was transferred to the Government Printing Office, where he assisted Barton and Britton with the official history. At the same time he studied Arts at Sydney University and won

12. Bonwick to Barton, 5 Feb., 1892. DL MS Q102.
13. J. Bramston to Samuel, 23 Oct., 1896. ML MSS 152.
14. Bonwick to Samuel, 12 Sept., 1887. ML MSS 152.
15. Samuel to Parkes, 3 Aug., 1888. ML MSS 152.
16. Barton to Sir George Dibbs, 7 Nov., 1892. N.S.W. Archives. Colonial Secretary's letters, 6120.
17. The Free Public Library, Sydney, was opened by the New South Wales Government in 1869. In 1895 the name was changed to the Public Library of New South Wales and in 1969 to the Library of New South Wales.
18. See N.S.W. Legislative Assembly. *Votes and Proceedings*. 1890, v. 8, pp. 655-83; Barton to J. See, 15 Feb., 1892. ML MSS AHI28.

Lord Rosebery's prize for the best undergraduate essay in History.¹⁹ He also qualified as a barrister and worked on an edition of New South Wales law reports.²⁰ In 1897 responsibility for the *Records* was transferred from the Government Printer to the Public Library and Bladen joined the Library staff. He was appointed Lending Librarian in 1898 and in 1907 he became Principal Librarian.

Eight volumes of the *Historical records of New South Wales* were published between 1892 and 1901. One volume dealt with the life and voyages of Cook, while the other seven were concerned with the history of New South Wales from the first proposals for a penal settlement in 1783 until 1811. The main source used by Bladen was the Bonwick Transcripts, but he also used records in the Colonial Secretary's Department, the Banks Papers, and papers lent by the King, Macarthur Onslow, Bligh, Norton and Johnston families. Bladen does not appear to have undertaken any extensive search for records in institutions and government departments in Sydney; the time he could devote to the *Records* was limited and he confined himself to writing an introduction for each volume and to preparing for publication the records located and assembled by others.²¹

Bladen and the History Board claimed that the *Records* would include all the relevant material, both official and private, that had been found, although documents of purely ephemeral or personal interest were to be excluded and duplication was to be avoided. The volumes contained despatches, government orders, private letters, log books and journals, and newspaper articles. The material was arranged in chronological order, although facility in locating documents was hampered by the necessity of keeping enclosures with the relevant despatches. The great weakness of the chronological arrangement was that the order of transcription of records in Britain could not be strictly chronological, for they had to be approached by record groups and classes.²² Material consequently reached Sydney which should have been included in volumes already published, and lengthy appendices were needed. The problem would have become progressively more acute had publication of the *Records* been continued indefinitely.

Being so dependent on Bonwick's transcripts, the *Records* were inevitably more selective than was intended. This weakness was aggravated by the chronological arrangement and by the omission of the archival references of the documents included: historians quoting from the *Records* could not refer to the location of the original item and it was difficult for them to ascertain whether material from a specific record group or class had been included. The selectivity of the *Records* also resulted from some self-imposed censorship, with all references to individual convicts and anything that reflected on the morality of soldiers, officials and free settlers being omitted, the omission being marked by asterisks.

Criticism of *Historical records of New South Wales* in the press was concerned not with the arrangement of the publication but with the broader question of

19. F.M. Bladen. The growth of the Australasian colonies and their present relation to the mother country. (Sydney, 1884)
20. F.M. Bladen. Reports of law cases, 1840-1886. ML MSS 970; Bladen to Barton. 11 Aug. 1891, DL MS Q102.
21. Bladen to H.C.L. Anderson, 25 June 1898. N.S.W. Archives. Dept. of Public Instruction records. P3937.
22. Bonwick to Samuel, 24 Sept., 1888. ML MSS 152.

whether the publication of historical documents should be a responsibility of the Government. Barton, predicting that the series could fill 100 volumes, asserted that there was no precedent to justify publication by the Government of the documents in full,²³ and some newspapers felt that only the more important items should be included. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, which thought that serious historians would still go to the original sources, stated, 'Four solid heavy tomes bring us only a few years on our way with New South Wales. In four volumes Mommsen had written the history of the majesty of Rome.'²⁴ *The Maitland Mercury* described the series as a 'monument of wasted energy' and implied that the early history of the colony was best forgotten.²⁵ However, the later volumes received favourable reviews, and the prospect of the series taking decades to complete was accepted with equanimity. In contrast, the idea of an official history had met with considerable opposition, and little regret was expressed that only two volumes of the *Official history of New South Wales* were ever published.

Despite commendation of the *Records* in the press, there were few sales and the publication proved a costly venture for the Government. An average of 120 copies of each volume were sold and the Government Printer reported that after Volume 4 'the whole life dropped out of it.'²⁶ Disapproval of Government expenditure was implicit in questions asked in Parliament about the series.²⁷ Three years elapsed between the appearance of the seventh and eighth volumes and it was not surprising that attempts should be made to transfer the responsibility for the publication to the new Federal Government.

In 1903 Bladen argued that the Commonwealth should take over the project when he reported to the Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton, on his recent visit to archives in Britain and several European countries.²⁸ He dwelt at length on the Public Record Office in London and referred to the multitudinous official records of early Australia held by that repository. He wrote, 'It would appear to be a wise step on the part of the Commonwealth Government to take the transcription of these old records in hand without delay, so that, when a Federal Library similar to the Congress Library in Washington is established, there will be ready at hand the authoritative records of the birth and adolescence of these new countries, which no printed or available books afford.' With regard to the publication of the records he wrote, 'It would not I think be necessary (at all events for some time) to attempt to print the archives in extenso. But an index or calendar with short preces of the most important documents should be prepared and printed and distributed freely to the Public Libraries in the States'. He argued that it was a work undertaken in every civilized country, that no individual could be expected to perform, and responsibility for which did not rest with any one State.

23. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May, 1892. p.10

24. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 Jan., 1894. p.4.

25. *Maitland Mercury*, 22 Dec., 1894.

26. W.A. Gullick to J.F. Watson, 7 Aug., 1912. NLA MS 237.

27. N.S.W. *Parliamentary Debates*. v.100, 24 Oct., 1899, p.1588; v.1, 8 Aug., 1901, p. 439.

28. Australia. *Parliamentary Papers*. 1903, no. 50. F.M. Bladen. Archives; report on European archives.

Already steps had been taken by the New South Wales Government to stop the work of collecting and publishing historical records. In 1902 the Trustees of the Public Library decided that Bonwick's work should be continued for the period 1830-1850, but their report was minuted by J. Perry, Minister for Public Instruction, with the words, 'I think this work should stop'. The Principal Librarian H.C.L. Anderson, replied that the work was properly the responsibility of the Federal Government since the early history of New South Wales was really the history of Australia. This suggestion appealed to Perry and in November 1902 the Premier sent all the relevant correspondence to Sir Edmund Barton. The Federal Government was reluctant to undertake such a project, but in 1906 a sum of £650 was placed on the estimates of the Department of External Affairs for the publication of historical records.²⁹

In 1907 the Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, wrote that publication should be preceded by a search in Britain and elsewhere for further records and sought the Premier's permission to have access to the Bonwick Transcripts. Approval was given and from 1907 to 1912 an officer, whose salary was reimbursed by the Federal Government, worked in the Public Library under Bladen's direction, indexing the Bonwick Transcripts.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library Committee became interested in the project. In July 1910 Bladen wrote to its Chairman, Charles McDonald, urging that the transcription of records in Britain should be continued up to 1856.³⁰ In the following month he met members of the Committee and they agreed that there was no need to alter the style of the publication or to incorporate Spanish or Dutch records. Bladen reported that the transcripts were reasonably complete up to 1830 and an immediate appointment in Britain was therefore not necessary. McDonald wrote to the Minister for External Affairs supporting the continuation of the publication of historical records. 'Without publication', he argued, 'these documents can scarcely be considered available to students and writers. They are, moreover, always liable to complete destruction by fire or accident, the only effective insurance against which is multiplication by printing'.³¹ In September 1911 responsibility for the publication of historical records was transferred from the Department of External Affairs to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library.³² The illness and death of Bladen prevented immediate publication and it was not until August 1912 that Dr J.F. Watson was appointed editor of *Historical records of Australia*.

Dr Frederick Watson (1879-1945) brought to his work qualities of enthusiasm and diligence, but his actual experience of historical work had been limited to the compilation of a history of Sydney Hospital.³³ He had graduated in medicine from Sydney University and done research in radiography in Paris and Vienna. For two years he had an extensive medical practice in western New South Wales.

29. J.F. Watson. Historical Records. NLA MS 237.

30. Bladen to C. McDonald, 28 July 1910.

31. McDonald to E.L. Batchelor, 6 Oct., 1910.

32. The Australian Section of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library was called the Commonwealth National Library in 1923. In 1960 the name was changed to the National Library of Australia.

33. J.F. Watson. The history of the Sydney Hospital from 1811 to 1911. (Sydney, Govt. Printer, 1911).

In 1910 he had become a trustee of the Public Library and in 1912, on Bladen's resignation, had acted as Principal Librarian. However, W.H. Ifould was preferred for the position and Watson immediately offered his services to the Commonwealth Government.³⁴

Watson was directly responsible to the Chairman of the Parliamentary Library Committee and the Librarian was in charge of the distribution of the *Records*. Consequently the series was recognized from the outset as the responsibility of the Library, whereas the publication of *Historical records of New South Wales* had generally been seen as an activity of the Government Printer. Watson worked under various agreements signed between 1912 and 1922. He was obliged to produce four volumes each year, for which he was paid £300 per volume; the sum was raised to £360 in 1922. His office was in Sydney and he and his assistant worked full-time on the *Records*.

Watson worked on *Historical records of Australia* from 1912 to 1925, with a break in the years 1917-19.³⁵ The New South Wales Government gave him access to the Bonwick transcripts and he made use of manuscripts in the Mitchell Library. The Library Committee planned to employ a transcriber in London to continue the work of Bonwick,³⁶ but no appointment was ever made. Apart from the Bonwick Transcripts, therefore, Watson had to rely on manuscripts in Australia and his greatest achievement was to discover extensive records which had been lying forgotten for many decades in Sydney, Hobart and other cities.

Watson's most active period of discovery was in 1912-13 when he found large collections of documents in the New South Wales Supreme Court, Governor's Office, Registrar-General's Office, Darlinghurst Gaol, the courthouses at Parramatta, Windsor, Liverpool and Berrima, the Bank of New South Wales, and the Macarthur archives at Camden, where many explorers' journals were held.³⁷ He was particularly excited to find in the Supreme Court 150 bags of legal documents, many dating from the years 1788-1800.³⁸ Some of these were reproduced in facsimile form in *The beginnings of government in Australia*, which the Library Committee published in 1913. From 1913 to 1917 Watson concentrated on editorial work, but in 1920 and 1921 he visited Tasmania and transcribed many papers found in Government House, the Supreme Court, Chief Secretary's Office, Surveyor-General's Office, the Royal Society, and Launceston Gaol.³⁹ The Tasmanian Government became enthusiastic about these discoveries and appointed an officer to examine, collate and index the records. The Commonwealth Government made a grant of £500 to Tasmania in 1921 for this work and further sums were paid in 1923 and 1925.

The discovery by Watson of many early records which had not appeared in *Historical records of New South Wales* caused the Library Committee to revise its plan. Instead of beginning with 1811, where the earlier publication had ceased,

34. Watson to McDonald, 23 June 1915; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 Jan., 1945.

35. Work was stopped in 1917 because of high printing costs as a result of wartime shortage of paper and also because Watson wished to enlist in the Army.

36. A. Wadsworth to Watson, 26 Sept., 1913.

37. Watson to Wadsworth, 15 Dec., 1913; Watson to McDonald, 15 Dec., 1914.

38. Watson to McDonald, 16 Oct., 1912.

39. Watson to Sir Elliot Johnson, 1 Sept., 1920, 1 Nov., 1920, 21 Oct., 1921.

it was decided to make *Historical records of Australia* a completely new work, commencing with the year 1787 and going up to 1855, when responsible government was instituted.⁴⁰ Many of the documents in the earlier series thus reappeared in *Historical records of Australia*. Despite duplication, this decision was justified: for instance, 35 of the despatches to or from Governor Phillip and 78 despatches to or from Governor Bligh had not been included in *Historical records of New South Wales* and the omissions were even more apparent in such fields as law and exploration.

Another major revision in the arrangement of the *Records* was made by Watson. Instead of publishing all the documents in one chronological sequence he decided to place them in seven series:

- I New South Wales Governors' despatches
- II General administration papers
- III Papers referring to settlements in the States
- IV Legal papers
- V Exploration papers
- VI Scientific papers
- VII Ecclesiastical, naval and military papers.

Although Watson collected material for all but the seventh series, only in Series I, III and IV were volumes actually published. In Series I 26 volumes were published, containing despatches and their enclosures to and from the Governor of New South Wales from 1787 to 1849. Each volume had a synopsis of despatches and Watson's arrangement certainly facilitated the location of specific documents. From Volume 14 onwards despatches whose enclosures were more appropriately included in other series were omitted, but were listed at the beginning of each year.

Six volumes of Series III were published, covering the period 1803-1830 and dealing with the various early settlements in Tasmania and Western Australia, and the short-lived settlements at Port Phillip, Westernport, Melville Island and Raffles Bay. The series resembled *Historical records of New South Wales* in the variety of its contents, as it included despatches, general orders, accounts, instructions and explorers' journals. It was arranged chronologically but the papers relating to a specific settlement were kept together within each volume and these sections were sometimes subdivided into despatches and miscellaneous papers.

Only one volume in Series IV appeared, containing official papers dealing with the constitutional development of New South Wales and Tasmania from 1786 to 1827. It included, in one chronological sequence, governors' commissions and oaths, Acts and letters-patent establishing courts, and correspondence on legal matters between the judge-advocates, governors, Colonial Office and Crown law officers.

Historical records of Australia is therefore a very incomplete publication, with not even Series I reaching the period of responsible government. Nevertheless, it has been of great value for Australian historians and references to it appear in a wide range of histories, law books, and general reference books. Its scope is more clearly defined than that of the earlier publication and, within those limits,

40. Watson to P.M. Glynn, 16 Sept., 1913.

it has a stronger claim to completeness. Series I covers the first 60 years of Australian history, a period when the powers of the governors were all-pervasive, and consequently their despatches contain material on most aspects of early Australia. The publication is free of most of the censorship of *Historical records of New South Wales* although Watson had been instructed to exclude scandalous references to individuals: it is clear that people were becoming less sensitive about the sins of their ancestors.⁴¹ Perhaps the main weakness of *Historical records of Australia* is that the class and piece numbers of official papers are not given and, as a result, it is often difficult to use the volume in conjunction with the original records on microfilm.⁴²

The publication was acclaimed by the doyens of Australian historians, Professors G. A. Wood and Ernest Scott, who both asserted that, for the first time, it would enable Australian history to be taught in the universities.⁴³ There was general approval in the press and the question of whether the collection and publication of historical records was a legitimate function of government was no longer raised. Reviewers appear to have agreed that the Parliamentary Library was the most appropriate body to undertake such a work and an annual expenditure of £2,000 on the publication, at a time when the Library vote was only £6,000, was not considered extravagant. Watson's introduction to the first volume was attacked by *The Bulletin* on account of its style⁴⁴ and by Wood for its rather naive remarks on the value of historical studies.⁴⁵ Subsequent introductions were checked more carefully and press reviews were almost always descriptive rather than critical.⁴⁶ Parliamentarians were unanimous in their praise of the publication and were quick to protest if they failed to receive free sets. The sales of the *Records* were scarcely better than those of *Historical records of New South Wales*, but they were acquired by many of the leading research libraries in the English-speaking world.

In 1926 Watson's contract expired and was not renewed. His attitude to the Library Committee had become extremely hostile in the previous year following the failure of the Government Printer to publish four volumes, and the reluctance of the Committee to compensate Watson for the resulting loss in income.⁴⁷ Various journalists applied for the editorial position but they were not considered acceptable. In December 1926 Professors Wood and Scott reported to the Committee on the future of the *Records*. They questioned the need to print all the documents in full, preferring the calendar method used in the English

41. Wadsworth to Watson, 21 Aug., 1912. Watson suggested that documents of 'a compromising or prurient nature' should be included in a reserve volume which would be limited to a few copies. This volume, which undoubtedly would have become a collector's item, was not published.
42. Much of the criticism to which Watson has been subjected is anachronistic and overlooks the nature of his sources. His work was based on the Bonwick Transcripts and on records in Australia that were in a chaotic state; the preservation of the original archival order was therefore out of the question. In any case, in 1911 no Australian librarian or historian seems to have been aware of the importance of preserving the original archival order.
43. G. A. Wood to McDonald, 13 Oct., 1914; *Argus*, 9 Nov., 1922, p. 4.
44. *The Bulletin*, 5 Feb., 1914. Red Page.
45. Wood to McDonald, 13 Oct., 1914.
46. The *Argus* was critical of the whole idea of the *Records*. See 7 Nov., 1922, p. 8.
47. See *Papers relating to the editing of the Historical Records of Australia*. (Sydney, 1926)

State Papers. They suggested that the new editor should also fill the position of Commonwealth Keeper of Records and that the Commonwealth Archives should be quite distinct from the National Library. No action resulted from the report.⁴⁸

No serious steps were taken to resume publication of *Historical records of Australia* in the next twelve years. The Commonwealth National Library was pre-occupied after 1927 in establishing itself in Canberra and the expenditure of public money on historical records was not possible during the Depression. In the late 1930s there was some pressure to resume publication, mainly from the historical societies, and Scott raised the subject at a meeting of ANZAAS in January 1939. Almost no interest was evinced in Parliament, but the Librarian, Kenneth Binns, began to study the subject in 1938. He spoke with leading historians and there was general agreement that all future volumes should be checked by an advisory board of three historians, that the editor should be based in Sydney, and the microfilming should be used in collecting records overseas.⁴⁹ One of the essential tasks was the further transcription of documents in Britain and when Binns' deputy, H.L. White, visited Britain in 1939 he was instructed to find a competent person to take charge of the copying of Public Record Office files.

It was significant that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library undertook the publication of *Historical records of Australia* in 1911. In the same year the Commonwealth Parliament approved the purchase of the rich collection of E. A. Petherick and in 1912 it passed the Copyright Act, under which publishers were obliged to place with the Library one copy of every book published in Australia. These three events marked the beginning of the transition from a purely parliamentary library to a national library, and in the years following 1911 the Librarian frequently referred to the publication of *Historical records of Australia* as being the first of many national services that would be provided when the Library moved to Canberra.

Yet shortly before these developments took place the Mitchell Library had been opened as a distinct part of the Public Library of New South Wales. With the richest collection of Australiana it had strong claims to being considered Australia's national library and it was not long before rivalry between it and Commonwealth Parliamentary Library became apparent. It was manifest in 1912-13 when each library felt it should hold the Bonwick Transcripts and in 1920-23 when they both sought the King and Cook manuscripts. Eventually, rivalry was to play an important part in the events that led to the Joint Copying Project agreement.

While the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library had accepted the responsibility for the publication of historical records, it was the Mitchell Library which took the initiative in continuing the work of Bonwick in Britain and Europe. In 1914 the Mitchell Librarian, Hugh Wright, visited libraries in Paris, Le Havre, Caen, Madrid and Seville searching for, and occasionally copying manuscripts relating to Australia. Two years before Mme R. Helouis had begun the transcription, on behalf of both the Mitchell and Commonwealth Parliamentary Libraries, of the journals and letters of French Explorers held by the Bibliotheque Nationale, the

48. The Parliamentary Library Committee drafted a Bill relating to Public Archives in 1927, but it was not presented to Parliament.

49. K. Binns. Report on the Historical Records of Australia and recommendations for the resumption of publication. (Canberra, 1939).

Department de Marine, and the archives at Caen. In the 1920s the Mitchell Library employed a copyist in the Public Record Office to transcribe governors' despatches of the period 1823-1855, not already held in Sydney. Further searching in Britain and France was undertaken by Miss Ida Leeson of the Mitchell Library in 1927. She was particularly interested in Cook and Solander material and other early naval records and surveyed the Australian collections of the British Museum, Linnean Society, Royal Geographical Society, Royal Society and Public Record Office.⁵⁰

The development of photocopying techniques suggested exciting possibilities for the copying of historical records. In 1927 Miss Leeson listed material in the Public Record Office for photostat copying. However, in the following year the Library of Congress began to use a microfilm camera for the copying of American documents in Paris and other European cities⁵¹ and Ifould and his colleagues in the Public Library of New South Wales decided to postpone mechanical copying until microfilming techniques had improved. In 1934 J.W. Metcalfe, the Deputy Principal Librarian, visited Europe and America and studied the progress made in microfilming. He made microfilm negatives of a few hundred documents relating to Governor Bourke and deposited them in the Mitchell Library. Ifould himself discussed the possibilities of microfilming on an overseas trip in 1936.⁵²

By 1939 considerable pressure was being put on Ifould to arrange the immediate copying, either by photostat or microfilm, of records in Britain and the Continent and it was suggested that Miss Leeson should be sent overseas for two or three years to select papers for copying. Ifould felt that such a project was still premature. He was sure that, if war broke out, the Public Record Office would take adequate measures to preserve the original documents. Unlike some historians, who disliked the idea of using a machine to read their sources, he was convinced of the superiority of microfilm over photostat copies, on the grounds of cost and the storage space saved. But microfilming was still in its infancy and the film produced at the time was not expected to last more than 25 years. Improvements were continually being made in microfilming techniques and Ifould therefore argued that it would be better to wait a few years until film with a greater life-expectancy had been produced and tested. He also had doubts about selective filming. While it would be necessary to select specific series for filming, he feared that to select only certain items within a series would risk reproducing the weaknesses of the Bonwick Transcripts: it was the task of the historian, not the librarian, to assess the relevance to Australia of a specific document. Finally Ifould favoured co-operation with the National and State Libraries before embarking upon such a huge project.

In retrospect, Ifould's cautiousness seems justified. However, the Mitchell Library Trustees⁵³ decided in April 1939 to commence microfilming all documents in British archives relating to Australia and the Southern Pacific, to be followed by a search of European archives. Miss Leeson would supervise the filming

50. I. Leeson. Report on work done and to be done in copying overseas of records relating to the history of Australia and the Pacific Islands. (Sydney, 1933).

51. See Grace Griffin. Foreign American history manuscript copies in Library of Congress Journal of Documentary Reproduction, v. 3, 1940, pp. 3-9.

52. T.D. Mutch to J.S. Rosevear, 6 June 1945.

53. Strictly speaking, there was nobody called the 'Mitchell Library Trustees', as the Mitchell Library was vested in the Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales.

in Britain. The National and State Libraries were to be offered positives of the microfilm, the charge covering a proportion of the cost of the negative and overhead expenses.⁵⁴ On hearing of the Trustee's decision, Binns of the National Library informed Ifould that he had instructed White to discuss the microfilming of Australian records with Public Record Office officials and, if they were agreeable, to secure the services of a firm of photographers to carry out the work. Binns felt that the two libraries should not proceed independently and urged Ifould to postpone action until possible co-operative arrangements had been discussed.⁵⁵

Binns spoke of 'co-operation' and 'free discussion', but he clearly hoped that the National Library would secure the sole right to film Australian material in the Public Record Office, although he was ready to provide positives to the Mitchell Library and any State Libraries that required them. He argued that, as the National Library was to resume publication of *Historical records of Australia*, it should also be responsible for the collection of official records in Britain, and that in any case a project to microfilm records relating to the whole of Australia should be undertaken by the Commonwealth, and not one of the States. Ironically, this was basically the argument that Ifould's predecessor, Bladen, had used in 1903. Ifould replied that the Mitchell Library would consider sympathetically the needs of *Historical records of Australia* in arranging the order of filming, but he could not accept Binns's second argument: the Mitchell bequest was, he insisted, a gift to the nation and not just to New South Wales.⁵⁶ A further factor which carried weight with both men, and which was recognized in a detached way by other librarians,⁵⁷ was that the library which undertook the project would gain considerable prestige.⁵⁸

In June 1939 the argument shifted to London. Ifould reported that the Public Record Office had no objection to the Mitchell Library's proposal, but that a shortage of space in the Office would delay the commencement of filming.⁵⁹ At the same time White arrived in London and consulted people experienced with microfilm, including Miss R.A. Fisher, the Library of Congress representative. Miss Fisher suggested that the two libraries could co-operate in copying: while the Library of Congress was making photostats, the National Library could use its microfilm camera, and while the camera was being used on American documents, the National Library agent could select and list further material for copying. In this way 50,000 pages could be filmed in a year. White recommended this scheme but mentioned that a commercial firm would also be willing to undertake the filming. As both schemes would utilize cameras already installed in the Public Record Office, there would be no delay in commencing filming.⁶⁰ Binns favoured co-operation with the Library of Congress and White made a formal application to film Public Record Office documents.

Despite numerous letters and two conferences, the National Library and the Mitchell Library could find no way to co-operate and it seemed that, at the risk of

54. W.H. Ifould to K. Binns, 18 May, 1939.

55. Binns to Ifould, 19 May, 1939.

56. Ifould to Binns, 27 June, 1939.

57. H.R. Purnell to Binns, 15 July, 1939.

58. K. Binns. Notes of meeting with Trustees of Mitchell Library, 15 Aug., 1939.

59. Ifould to Binns, 27 June, 1939.

60. H.L. White to Binns, 7 July, 1939.

extensive duplication, each library would embark on a separate microfilming project. In August 1939 the Mitchell Library Trustees reaffirmed their resolution of April, although they stated that every effort would be made to fit in with the requirements of *Historical records of Australia* and the cost of positives would be less than originally suggested.⁶¹ At the same time the Australian High Commission in London completed arrangements with the Public Record Office for the National Library to begin filming Colonial Office papers.⁶² However, these resolutions and agreements were made ineffectual within a week. On 3 September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany, the Public Record Office collections were moved from London into the country, and the question of copying was postponed indefinitely.

In 1944 the Commonwealth National Library appointed L.C. Key as its first Liaison Officer in London. Soon after his arrival in Britain he reopened negotiations with the Public Record Office. He was told that, once the War was over, a truckload of Colonial Office records could be brought back to London and they could then be filmed immediately. Neither the Library of Congress nor the commercial firm had a microfilm camera in London any longer and Key was urged to buy a camera and install it in the Office. It would be operated by one of the staff of the Public Record Office, provided that his salary was reimbursed by the National Library. The Public Record Office was concerned about the shortage of space in its search rooms and suggested that the National Library might be able to initiate a co-operative arrangement with Canada and the other dominions.⁶³

In April 1945 the Mitchell Library again sought permission to copy all the records relating to Australia in the Public Record Office. Its Chairman of Trustees, H.V. Evatt, who in his dealings with the National Library did not hesitate to use his authority as a Commonwealth Minister, was then in London and was shocked to learn that Key had raised the matter almost a year before.⁶⁴ Some terse correspondence passed between Sydney and Canberra. It was obvious that the Public Record Office would not permit two Australian libraries to occupy valuable space copying identical records and it seemed that the library which was the first to confirm its intention to begin filming immediately would be given the exclusive right to copy Australian records.

Metcalf, who had succeeded Ifould as Principal Librarian, met Binns in July 1945 in an effort to improve the strained relations between the two libraries. Together they drafted an agreement that became the basis of the Joint Copying Project. The Commonwealth National Library and the Mitchell Library would be equal participants in the copying of Public Record Office records, the order of copying would be based on the needs of *Historical records of Australia* and the immediate research needs of students, and copying in institutions outside the Public Record Office would be on a co-operative basis where desired by both libraries.⁶⁵

The Mitchell Library Trustees took some time to confirm the agreement and at one stage it appeared that both libraries would still attempt to undertake the

61. Ifould to Binns, 22 Aug., 1939.

62. R. Maxwell to F. Strahan, 29 Aug., 1939.

63. L.C. Key to Binns, 16 Oct., 1944.

64. Key to Binns, 17 April, 1945.

65. Binns to J.W. Metcalfe, 19 July, 1945.

filming individually. Finally, on 20 October 1945, Metcalfe and T.D. Mutch met White and drew up an agreement which had the approval of both libraries. In addition to the general clauses of the July agreement, it specified that Binns, who was about to visit America, would buy a Microfile C Recordak camera; that copying would be supervised by the National Library Liaison Officer, who would arrange to have two sets of positives made in London and who would send the negative set to Canberra; and that the order of the copying would be determined by the needs of the publications of the two libraries, but would otherwise be chronological, with series of papers from different departments and referring to different States taken in parallel.⁶⁶ The agreement received a good deal of attention in the press, where it was stated that the project would take five years to complete and would involve the copying of over one million pages of manuscripts.⁶⁷

Binns visited the United States in November 1945 and, after consultation with officers of the National Archives and University Microfilms, he arranged the purchase of a Microfile D camera, which would be able to film larger documents than the C model. He then travelled to Britain and was assured by the Public Record Office that there were sufficient operators to ensure continuous filming. It was suggested that copying commence with the Public Record Office and departmental indices, which could then be used to plan subsequent filming.⁶⁸

Unexpected problems delayed the commencement of filming. In June 1946 the ship carrying the microfilm camera to Britain collided with another vessel in mid-Atlantic and the camera was lost. It took a year to bring a replacement to London and by that time the room that had been set aside for Australian copying in the Public Record Office was no longer available. While waiting for the Office to complete its extensions, C.A. Burmester, the National Library Liaison Officer, drew up lists of series to be filmed in the early stages of the project and also surveyed the holdings of a number of other institutions in London, including the London Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society, Methodist Missionary Society, Royal Empire Society and the Hydrographic Department.⁶⁹ The microfilming of Colonial Office records finally commenced on 3 August 1948.

The history of the Joint Copying Project since 1948 has been remarkably peaceful and productive, compared with the conflicting plans, unfinished schemes, and periods of inactivity of the preceding 60 years. After 22 years of continuous microfilming, there are still many large series containing Australian material in the Public Record Office alone which have not been copied under the Australian Joint Copying Project. Nevertheless, the Project has largely realized the dream of Bonwick, Bladen, Watson and other historians, librarians and politicians that 'the records of the genesis of Australian nationhood' would be made available to students throughout Australia.

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66. Metcalfe to Binns, 22 Oct., 1945.

67. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 1 Nov. 1945, p.3.

68. K. Binns. Report of overseas trip, 1 March, 1946.

69. C.A. Burmester to White, 29 April, 1948.

NOTES

I would like to thank Sir Harold White, Mr C A. Burmester and Mr G.D. Richardson for reading this paper and suggesting improvements. I am, of course, alone responsible for the opinions expressed and for the emphasis that I may have placed on certain events and individuals.

Unless indicated otherwise, the letters to which references are made are in the files of the National Library of Australia.