

AT THE DRAWING BOARD

Problems in the professional education of the archivist,

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This essay is concerned with the education of archivists; a problem which has elicited solutions of one sort or another since the late 18th century. Nevertheless, the topic has immediacy. In the United States, North Carolina archivist and professor of history H.G. Jones can sketch archival training courses at four major universities, and yet bemoan the fact that, in 1968, "we have failed in our responsibility to provide proper archival training ..."¹ And in Australia, we are confronted with a veritable handful of archives units attached to library science syllabuses for the "interested student" and the hope of a proper training school in the near future. We take our cue from this proposal and discuss the issues faced by the architects of such a program.

Five separate topics would seem to warrant attention. First, and fundamental is the question of why one should bother about training archivists at all. Secondly, what should archivists be trained for? — i.e. in terms of the type of archives office in which they might work. Thirdly, what prerequisites for entry should be insisted upon? Fourthly, in what manner does library training impinge upon an archives training program? Fifthly, what should the syllabus include? In the light of these points, the article concludes with some remarks on present and future training programs in Australia.

I

There are, I think, two reasons for wanting to train archivists. There is the selfish reason; and there is what I regard as the acceptable and valid motivation — that is, a truly professional one.

On the one hand, it is perhaps uncharitable but nevertheless in many cases correct to suggest that archivists regard formal training of recruits as an essential prerequisite for entry to the Professionals Club. Here, in the company of medicos, accountants and zoo-keepers, the archivist can at last taste "the mystique of 'professionalism', the magical authority of science, and the doctrinaire insistence upon the separateness of the profession"² One wonders, for instance, how many Australian archivists see the proposed school for archives first as an opportunity for emancipation from the L.A.A.³ If such are the reasons for seeking a formal training course, they must be rejected as void of any regard for the basic tenets of archives management, namely conservation and service.

1. H.G. Jones — "Archival training in American universities 1938-1968". American Archivist 31 (2), April 1968, p 154.
2. John C. Colson — "On the education of archivists and librarians". American Archivist 31 (2), April 1968, p 168
3. Symptoms of this profession fixation can occasionally be seen within the L.A.A. Witness, for example, the reaction to the elevation of Miss Wilma Radford to the new chair of librarianship at the University of N.S.W. See "A profession with a professor", Australian Library Journal 17 (9) October 1968: 306-308.

Our second reason must now be obvious. Courses must be introduced, and entry qualifications established, because only in such fashion can the archivist properly serve his archives and his “customers”. That is, in fact, the theme which underlies Jenkinson’s Inaugural Lecture (at the University of London) introducing a new course in archives administration, in 1947.⁴ In similar vein, Ernst Posner has written that “Training courses are needed because otherwise soundness and uniformity of archival procedure cannot be reached in a given country”⁵.

II

No training program should hope for, and none can successfully achieve, the turning out of a complete and omniscient archivist. Some archival practices are best taught and mastered in apprentice-like, “in the field” conditions. Syllabuses, consequently, must be biased towards the generalisation and the theoretical.

One comes to the same conclusion if the variety of archives offices opened to archivists-in-training is realised. Granted that formal training will inevitably be an incomplete preparation, the acceptable syllabus would be designed such that graduates would feel no more at a loss in a state archives office (federal, state or local) than in a manuscripts library, departmental registry, or a church, university, hospital, business or scientific institute archives office.

III

The next question is: who should be trained in terms of educational qualifications? This is no more important than those previously canvassed. It is here treated more thoroughly, all the same.

Specifically, we ask after the educational pre-requisites of postulants (a) in terms of the *level* attained; and (b) in terms of the *subject* qualification.

With respect to the level of education necessary for acceptance to archival training courses, the briefest reading of the history of training programs in the U.S.A., the U.K., and European countries reveals an insistence upon high entrance qualifications. In Britain, during the early decades of the present century, clerks from the Civil Service Commission were recruited to the Public Record Office with little concern for university degree qualifications. After 1929, however, only history or classics graduates were interviewed. In 1947 – with the opening of the University of London’s School of Archives Studies – an honours Arts degree

4. Published as The English archivist: a new profession. London, H.K. Lewis, 1948.

5. “European experiences in training archivists”, in Posner, Ernst, Archives and the public interest. Wash., Public Affairs Press, 1967, p.56

with Latin and Medieval French had become the only acceptable qualification.⁶ European archivists, themselves traditionally well-established historians, have come to demand a bachelor's degree as the very minimum entrance qualification. The famous Ecole Nationale des Chartes and the Austrian Institute for Historical Research insist that archives students obtain a higher degree during their training years. The Italian and the Dutch merely prefer higher degree entrants. On the other hand, the German Institute for Archival Science and Advanced Historical Studies at Berlin-Dahlem "opens its doors only to those who have completed their university education as evidenced by the doctor's degree."⁷ In the U.S., graduates and undergraduates are offered units, semesters and summer schools in archival training. Many history Ph.D's are accepted for such units, although there is no strict prerequisite qualification.⁸

The educational qualification for entry to a proper archives course in Australia must follow this pattern sketched above. Disregarding subjects for the moment, a tertiary-level diploma or degree is called for. The advantages of accepting only students so accredited has little to do with the conveying of professional status, or with the rather tattered claim that graduates *qua* graduates are intelligent. Such people are, however, vaguely familiar with research methods; are receptive to the more obtuse point of archival theory; and presumably can listen to and assist Ph.D's, government officials, etc. without too much personal or intellectual embarrassment. Colson concurs for more practical reasons. As a graduate, the student will attend a program of study devoted entirely to archival training. As part of an undergraduate's training, however, there would be "an unnecessary (and, one is tempted to add, reckless) dilution of the student's general education." The novice, he maintains, "should not be distracted by the demands of other disciplines."⁹

Granted, then, that only the tertiary-qualified are to be admitted for archives training, should any particular discipline be preferred/insisted upon? Are only history students with language proficiency to be admitted?

We noted above that the English schools insisted that their entrants be fluent in Latin and Medieval French. No such requirement is mentioned in Posner's 1940 survey of European schools. This is not to deny that graduates from most universities on the continent probably are at least bilinguals.

Language prerequisites – at least in the case of Britain – reflect the nature of archival material found in British repositories. If this is so, then there seems little sense in a language prerequisite for an Australian archives school. Unless, of

6. For a discussion of the training programs available in Britain, see Posner, *ibid.*, pp. 45-48; Raymond Irwin, "The education of an archivist," in Albert E.J. Hollaender, ed. *Essays in memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, Chichester, Moore & Tillyer, 1962; 178-189; Miss M. Pamplin, "Archive training in the Bodleian library, Oxford", Paper delivered to the 14th biennial conference of the L.A.A.; and Roger Ellis, "The British archivist and his training," *Journal 3* (6), October 1967: 265-271. The Handbook of the University of London outline of subjects for the School of Library, Archive, and Information Studies is also useful.
7. Posner, *ibid.*, p. 51
8. On training programs in America, see Posner's "Archival training in the United States," *ibid.*, pp. 58-77, and Jones, *art. cit.*
9. Colson, *art. cit.*, p. 174

course, one suggests that, with a reading knowledge of German, Dutch and French, one can then comprehend the best archival texts in the world.¹⁰ Now I am not in a position to judge the acclaimed virtues of studying European archives references. An opinion is hazarded, nevertheless. It would appear that, where texts have been seen to be of international value and repute, then an English translation is not long in appearing, (e.g., Muller, Feith & Fruin). Further, as Australian archival practice has tended to follow British and especially American approaches to archives management, German, French and Dutch trends can probably be passed over with minimum deleterious effect.¹¹

The question of history as a prerequisite is not so easily resolved. Argument pro and con turns upon the supposed advantages of historiographical skills; and on the engendered appreciation of a discipline which draws much of its nourishment from archival material. That is, it is argued that only history-trained entrants will be best suited to fully understand why archives are important to the researcher, and to understand and help with their problems. Both Schellenberg and Jenkinson have said as much.¹² And Jenkinson has written of the archivist that “he should have a close and up to date acquaintance with the trend of all the more important studies which depend for their progress upon documentary work: that is to say he must be strong on the bibliographical side of Research – well up in what has been done and is doing: that he must be particularly knowledgeable in the matter of Reference Books of every kind: *and that his training must teach him how to attain and keep, such qualifications.*” (My emphasis)¹³. It might be as well to clear up a misunderstanding over what Jenkinson really did say *re* the archivist and historian. In his *Manual*, he is clearly opposed in principle to a successful marriage of both professions. Thus: “the Archivist is not and ought not to be an Historian.” But then, “He will need, of course, some knowledge of history.”¹⁴ The reasoning involves the danger that the historical interests of the archivist will influence his arrangement of the archives.

Subsequently, Jenkinson came to allow that the archivist may have to write administrative histories because they were “indispensable equipment for the researchers or others who, in whatever interest, may desire to exploit the same documents.”¹⁵ And in his last published article Jenkinson had come to the view that “the study of Administrative History is a matter not of choice but of necessity: he not only needs it as a background but must ... actively engage in extending it for the immediate purposes of his own work ...”¹⁶

10. As H.J. Gibbney argued in his paper “Reflections on Australian archives”, read to the 13th biennial conference of the L.A.A.
11. For a recent statement of the manner in which Australian archival practice has drawn from British and American experience, see Frank B. Evans, “Modern concepts of archives administration and record management.” *Unesco bulletin for libraries*, 24 (5), September-October 1970: 242-247.
12. T.R. Schellenberg, “Archival training in library schools.” *American Archivist*, 31 (2), April 1968, p. 158.
13. Jenkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28
14. Jenkinson. – *A manual of archive administration*. Lond., Lund Humphries, 1965, p.123.
15. Jenkinson. – *The English Archivist*, p. 23 and p.30
16. “Roots”, in the *Journal* 2 (4), October 1961, p. 134.

The three statements quoted, though apparently contradictory, are consistent in at least one important aspect. Originally opposed to the historian/archivist because of the danger of biased arrangement and description, Jenkinson allows for the archivist the only type of history that can foster correct archival principles! For only if one had restored one's archival material to its original order could one write an administrative history. The reverse is just as valid. Finally, it should be recalled that Jenkinson was never opposed to history graduates becoming archivists. Rather, it was the professional historian who was an archivist at the same time to whom he objected.

Whilst not denying the advantages of studying history, I think we should avoid making a degree in history a hard and fast rule. The subject information contained in archives repositories varies enormously, and this variety should be reflected in the university backgrounds of the staff. It is surely an advantage if, in the archives of a scientific institute, science graduates with proper archives qualifications, are amongst its archivists. Furthermore, such willingness to interview a graduate from *any* faculty genuinely interested in the profession, is in keeping with the trend towards specialisation of archival materials and repositories as discussed by Roger Ellis, and Jenkinson himself.¹⁷ It is worth adding that administrative history and research methodology would be included in the syllabus proposed later in this essay. Non-history trained students would not, therefore, be ignorant of their customers' problems and needs.

IV

Like chemists and health-food enthusiasts, physiotherapists and masseurs, librarians and archivists have "had their differences". Librarians, the original custodians of manuscripts and (sometimes) archives, have in the past ignored the claims that archival principles and methods are separate and essential to the exploitation of archival information. Archivists, for their part, are ever ready to relate their pet yarn of how some certain librarian wilfully harboured, or botched, or sold, someone else's archives.¹⁸ What part such episodes have played in engendering friction is impossible to judge. No satisfactory explanation of the *Australian* situation would be complete, however, without mention of

- a. the fact that the librarian has generally been the archivist's executive superior and
- b. personalities, especially in relation to the Paton Committee. It is not unimportant, further, that whereas in the U.S., U.K., and European countries archivists have their own professional associations, Australian archivists enjoy – with uneasy symbiosis – the protection of the Library Association of Australia.

17. Roger Ellis, *art. cit.*, pp. 268-9; and Jenkinson, "Roots", p. 138.

18. E.g., H.J. Gibbney, *art. cit.*; G.L. Fisher, "Archival development in South Australia", *Australian Library Journal* 18 (3), April 1969, p. 72-3; and Armando Petrucci, "Archives and libraries: possibilities of collaboration." *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries* 20 (2), March-April 1966, p. 66.

Just how alike are these two sciences? ¹⁹ What common ground can be elucidated? Really, one's answer depends on the point of reference. Colson, for instance, highlights a mutual concern for "making information available for use", and quotes "a distinguished European archivist" in support.²⁰ Thus, both disciplines, whilst employing divergent principles of document organisation and description, do so with the user in mind. It is equally true, and just as commonplace, to acknowledge that both will feel the effects of the microreprography revolution.

There are fundamental differences, nevertheless; the most important being archival principles of arrangement and description. In view of this, the following guidelines are suggested.

1. Archives teachers/lecturers should be qualified and practising archivists. Not librarians, or historians.
2. Librarianship subjects, such as subject indexing, reference service, and government publications, could be studied with profit by archives students.²¹
3. Librarianship students might well be invited to take introductory subjects in archival theory. If this cannot be made compulsory, then at least prospective reference and manuscripts librarians should be encouraged to attend.

This is not to say that an archives course be offered with a library science program at the same tertiary institution. Our only wish *re* location is that, like nursing schools and training hospitals, the archives program be offered near a "training archives office."

V

In lieu of an actual list of subjects, we make the following points concerning subject areas.

1. Theory and principles of archives management must be thoroughly taught. (provenance, group, series.)
 2. Description by guides, lists, inventories. Ditto.
 3. Administrative histories of government departments – and of other offices that have deposited or produced records (i.e. businesses, churches, associations, etc.) – and the problems in researching for their compilation, must be offered.
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19. Namely, library science and archival science. I use the term "science" hesitantly, and only because it has become accepted usage. Archival science has also been referred to as "archivy" and "archival economy", the latter being a common European phrase.
 20. Colson, *art. cit.*, p. 170. The European archivist is Armando Petrucci. See Note 18.
 21. Subject indexing can help the archivist compile guides, descriptive lists, and indexes themselves. Reference study, by emphasising the importance and purpose of user interviews, by outlining the do's and don'ts of reference service, will also be valuable. The benefits from studying government publications is not immediately obvious – though it has been suggested by several writers. Perhaps government archivists would draw upon their knowledge of government publications in their research of government departmental history?

Secondly, the practical work of description should be emphasised. Such training has been incorporated into courses at the London University archives school, the America University programs, and at the University of N.S.W. librarianship archives syllabus.²²

On the other hand, I do not regard the technical aspects of training, namely preservation and reprography, as of similar importance. Certainly, archives students should be made aware of the value of conservation – as this will always be the archivist's first responsibility. Specific technical processes vary, however, between repositories, and in Australia, between States. This, and the fact that improvement and innovation are characteristic of any technical matter, prompts the conclusion that such a topic warrants at best one or two introductory lectures.

The discussion until now has concerned archival training generally – although where points were applicable to Australia, this was certainly noted. A closer look at the Australian archives training scene is now warranted.

Formal archival training had its beginnings in Australia in 1950. In that year, the L.A.A. included one archives subject as an elective unit in their Registration syllabus.²³ What actual teaching was offered for this unit is difficult to determine. Most State public libraries, the Commonwealth National Library, and a handful of correspondence schools did give assistance to Registration candidates on most library subjects. Presumably, therefore, State archivists were available for students taking the archives subject.

In 1954, the Canberra Archives Management Seminar (the "Schellenberg seminar") received a sub-committee report on the "requirements of archival training", but little concrete appears to have resulted.²⁴

Two further archives subjects were added to the Registration syllabus in 1962, but this was hardly the answer to the need of proper professional accreditation.²⁵

By 1971, two post-graduate librarianship schools were also offering units in archives management. These were the Library School at the University of N.S.W., and the Canberra College of Advanced Education.

Only a proper archives school can rectify this situation. Such a project can hope to succeed only if the following conditions obtain. (That is, apart from the

22. The University of London School of archives studies demands of its students one whole year of practical work involving the compilation of a Descriptive List or Index. Only upon the satisfactory completion of the "thesis" will the Diploma be awarded. See Raymond Irwin, *op. cit.* (note 6), and Mrs. A. Enderby, "Practical training for archivists," Archives and Manuscripts, 3 (5), Nov. 1967: 9-11.
23. Of this subject and the Registration award, R.C. Sharman wrote, "Most of the subject coverage of this exam, including the compulsory subjects, is of little or no use in the practice of the archival profession." See his "Library control of archives." Australian Library Journal, 9 (3), July 1960, p. 127.
24. Commonwealth National Library, Archives Division. Proceedings of the archives management seminar, Canberra, mimeographed, 1955, Appendix 8.
25. For a recent assessment of the three archives subject, see H.J. Gibbney's "The trials of training", Archives and Manuscripts 4(4), May 1971: 9-11.

availability of finance.) First, that Commonwealth and State public service boards, and all other employers of archivists, recognise the school's graduates as professional archivists; and are prepared to select these before career-oriented clerks. Secondly, the school's certification must be regarded as the only "ex officio" qualification for membership of any future archivists' association. Thirdly, the entire project will depend upon sufficient numbers requesting admission. And, if there is a lesson to be learnt from the success of British programs, it is that the future of Australian training rests almost entirely with the archivists themselves.