

THE ARCHIVIST AND THE HISTORIAN

by

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An archivist, addressing a group of historians as I am today, stands in a privileged position. He can afford to assume that his listeners know a good deal about archives, but he is confident that his audience will not expect him to have a corresponding familiarity with their subject. Archivists are not historians, and indeed, that doyen of all archivists, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, issued a stern injunction against the archivist who dabbled in history. Sir Hilary said¹:

. . . . the Archivist is not and ought not to be an Historian. He will need, of course, some knowledge of History and may be interested in it personally, just as he may be interested in Metallurgy or any other science: but his duty is to his Archives, independently of any of the Research subjects (of which at present History is the most prominent) which make use of Archives for their own ends; and therefore an interest in any of these subjects, since it might give him a prepossession in favour not only of a subject but also perhaps of a school of opinion within that subject, might be more than inconvenient or inappropriate, it might be positively dangerous.

Not all historians have agreed that there is a tremendous gulf set between the world of the archivist and that of the historian. G.M. Trevelyan once wrote² of archivists that "they are a class of historian to whom we others are bound by warm ties of affection and gratitude". A lot of archival water has flowed under the bridge – may I say a lot of respect des fonds has flowed under the pont, since Trevelyan wrote, and although one can scarcely say, in this country, that the archives profession now stands on its own feet, it certainly does not ally itself at the present moment to the profession of historian. Perhaps we would find strength if we were to link up with historians in some sort of archival/historical Society, for this paper will suggest that archivists need support and I for one can see no other way in which a viable archival society might be formed. For the point I was seeking to make when I began this address still holds – though we who practise archives management do not expect historians to look upon us as brothers, or even as former colleagues who have lost our way in a morass of disordered files and unclassified registers, we do expect historians to know something about archives. We would be surprised, I think, if we

* The paper which follows was delivered, in a slightly different form, to a group of historians at the 43rd Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science in Brisbane in May 1971, as part of the History Section (Section 26) program. Before publication here it was submitted to a Board of Reference for an opinion on whether it should be published, the writer being the Editor of this journal.

1. Jenkinson, Sir H. A manual of archive administration. 2nd ed., London, Lund, Humphries, 1937, p. 123.
2. Quoted by Roger H. Ellis in "The British Archivist and History", in Journal of the Society of Archivists, III (4) Oct. 1966, p. 155.

found that, when we referred to the British judge, formerly the (nominal) keeper of the Public Records, by his title of “Master of the Rolls”, historians among our audience assumed that we were speaking of some sort of glorified chauffeur. We would also be surprised if our references to “binding, boxing and bundling” were mistaken for allusions to the art of the pugilist. I was not only surprised, but also delighted, when I read an entry that one historian had written, at my request, in a visitors’ book at the Queensland State Archives some years ago. He had discovered in the records of the Colonial Secretary’s Office the information for which he had been seeking; I asked him to sign the visitors’ book, and include an entry for the record group which he had been using. He asked me exactly what to write, and I replied “Col. Sec’s Records”, whereupon he solemnly entered in the appropriate column “Cold Sex Records”.

The reasons for my expectation that historians should know something of archives are obvious enough. Professor George Rudé has suggested to what extent the historian is dependent upon the archivist in the opening remarks³ of an address given to the Tasmanian Historical Research Association under exactly the same title as this paper. He said:—

It is a truism that, among social scientists, the historian, being concerned with the “surviving” past, is the most thoroughly dependent on the written record — and, therefore, on its custodian, the archivist.

If this is true for the historian who sees himself as a social scientist, it is probably even more true for those who practise the historian’s craft in that old fashioned but still extremely respectable way wherein the narration of events and their interpretation, are emphasised. Such an historian, surely, is G.R. Elton, described⁴ by Arthur Marwick as holding an “up-to-date hard-line professional position” in the current debate on the purpose of historical study and writing. Elton, much to my gratification, is an eloquent champion of those who “crawl upon the frontiers of knowledge with a magnifying glass”.⁵ He says⁶. “The historian must make one initial choice, of the main area of study or line of approach. But after that (if he is worth considering at all) he becomes the servant of his evidence . . .”

Historians who, like Rudé, adopt an approach in which the quantitative and qualitative analysis of groups within society plays an extremely important part, are likely to find archives most useful if the group in which they concentrate their interest happens to be thoroughly described in archival fonds. The convicts make an excellent example — their initial conflict with society, their personal characteristics, their mode of life are all thoroughly documented in a particular record group. Historians with a bent towards this type of analysis of social groups might well find, however, that in a particular research project, archives are of no use to them whatever, if the group which they wish to study did not have its characteristics minutely

3. George Rudé in “The Archivist and the Historian, the Eldershaw Memorial Lecture, 1970”, in Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 17 (4) Oct 1970, p. 111.
4. Marwick, Arthur — The nature of history, Lond., Macmillan, 1970, p. 186
5. Elton, G.R. — The practice of history, Syd. University press, 1967, p. 20
6. Ibid., p. 62

recorded. Where would the social scientist/historian go, for instance, for information on the whaling and sealing fraternity who inhabited many of the islands of Bass Straits in the early years of the 19th Century?

Archivists are inclined to appreciate, therefore, contact with historians of the “straight-line professional tradition”; scholars whose emphasis is on what happened in history as a narrative; interpretation and generalisation are the historian’s prerogative, and the archivist would not dream to interfere in this aspect of his craft. The archivist is there to help the historian discover what actually happened, and if he can do that he has received his reward.

Some historians have tried to make much of the dullness of archives, implying that this dullness rubs off on to the custodian, and that historical manuscripts, on the other hand, have a freshness about them, which again is reflected in the institutions that house them, and in their curators. Professor F.K. Crowley, for instance, says:⁷

Archives, in the strict sense, tend to retain within themselves the atmosphere of their creation. They suggest the overwhelming sameness of clerkship, working to inflexible rules of procedure, the perpetuation of mediocre efficiency, and promotion by longevity. Private collections tend to have a more personal atmosphere about them. They illustrate life, not records-keeping systems. . . . Very frequently, too, the managers of these different types of collections grow like the stuff of their trade, if they were not already like it in the beginning.

This description of archives, and archivists, was scarcely conducive to the establishment of good relations between historians and archivists, but of course this was not Professor Crowley’s objective. What the Professor did not seem to realise, however, is that, if there is a quality about archives, whereby their dullness, like a contagion, infects the archivist who comes into contact with them, might not the historian, coming into contact with these same dread carriers of tedium, fall victim to the same complaint?

It is difficult for me to believe that archives are necessarily characterised by dullness, for if archives do nothing else, they reflect the way of life of the institutions that create them. It would be novel indeed to suggest that archives are created only by organisations which work to “inflexible rules of procedure”, for archives are created by all manner of organisations. In all the bewildering variety of organisations into which mankind throughout the ages has grouped its members, archives are created. This is one of their distinguishing features, and one that historians must understand. They are brought into being as the result of administrative activity – as a by-product of that activity. Unlike printed books, they are not produced in order to satisfy a cultural demand for reading, but almost, as it were, absent-mindedly. If the activity which the creating authority pursued was one characterised by the monotonous repetition of tedious tasks of no great significance, like the issuing of permits

7. F.K. Crowley in “Archives of Australia: a user’s view”. In Changing concepts in librarianship, the proceedings of the 14th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia, 1967 p.64 of Vol. 1

for the construction of septic tanks in Brisbane's unsewered wastelands, doubtless the archives created thereby will be dull. If, on the other hand, the producer of archives was engaged on a task which has gripped the imagination of an historian, who believes that a study of this particular function will earn him fame amongst the ranks of his colleagues or at least a Ph.D degree approved by a supervisor who will not fall asleep as he reads the dissertation, then surely the archives of that organisation will convey something of the fascination of the subject. If, for instance, an historian finds fascination in a study of the transportation of the convicts to Australia, it would be hard to credit an assertion that he regarded the archives of our Convict Departments, voluminous though they are, as anything but absorbing in their human interest.

To repeat a definition of archives which has become accepted as the classical one, at this stage, and in front of this audience, may well appear to be supererogatory, but this is what I intend to do. The definition comes,⁸ of course, from Sir Hilary Jenkinson.—

A document which may be said to belong to the class of archives is one which was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transaction (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part; and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for that transaction and their legitimate successors.

This definition brings out several very important points, but perhaps the only one I need to emphasise in the present context is the fact that there must be an identity between the transaction dealt with, and the document itself, before that document can be considered an archive. This means that for an historian who, like Elton, places great emphasis on what actually occurred in the past, archives become research materials of the first importance. Elton's definition of history will also be well known to you. He says:⁹

It (History) is concerned with all those human sayings, thoughts, deeds, and sufferings which occurred in the past and have left present deposit; and it deals with them from the point of view of happening, change and the particular.

For Elton, the "event" which has not left "present deposit" is a non-event. Archives of course, are not the only form of "present deposit", but because they were drawn up contemporaneously with the events to which they relate, and in fact were part of those events, they are likely to be of intense importance in the study of those events. Jenkinson goes on to claim for archives two qualities which reinforce the assertions he makes about the importance of archives. One of these is impartiality. They were drawn up in the course of administrative or executive activity, but not with research needs in mind; they may provide an interpretation of events which is partial in the sense that they present the activities of their creators in a favorable light, but as their

8. Jenkinson, op. cit. p.11

9. Elton, op. cit. p.12

creators could have no knowledge of the sorts of historical controversies to whose elucidation they might be summoned years after their compilation, it is unlikely that they will show a bias in favour of one or other side of those controversies. The compiler of archives, if he were a cashier, may well have been fiddling the petty cash, and deceiving his superior officer on that score; or, if he were a commissioner of crown lands, he may not in reality have inspected the pastoral holdings which he certified had been stocked in accordance with the pastoral leases legislation; but, whatever reasons he had for giving a false account to those to whom he was answerable, he could not have known the special interests of the historian who would one day, perhaps, be studying the records to ascertain political attitudes to the question of the alienation of crown lands.

The second archive quality of which Jenkinson speaks is that of authenticity. In part, he bases his reliance upon this quality on an insistence that archives should have been in the unbroken custody of their creators (or the legitimate successors of those creators) since their formation. But authenticity can be attributed to archives in relation to the very process of their creation. For this reason, I am hesitant to apply to records created in the course of an individual's private affairs the appellation "archives". Archives, par excellence, are created by organisations, by institutions, by formal groups within society. Within those groups almost invariably there is some form of verification; the record created is not the work of one man, who can place on paper his account of what happened without fear of his mis-statement being detected. Minutes of meetings are confirmed; accounts of a financial nature are subject to audit; and so on. In other words, throughout the activities of formal organisations of men there is this in-built process of verification, not an infallible check on the dishonesty or misrepresentation of those who would bend the record to suit their own ends, but nevertheless a powerful dissuader.

In view of all the merit in Jenkinson's discussion of archival quality, it is unfortunate that he makes one claim that seems altogether too sweeping. He says "Provided, then, that the student understands the . . . administrative significance (of archives) they cannot tell him anything but the truth." To do him justice, Jenkinson adds a footnote at this point, which admits that the proviso is a large one. He ought to have realised, however, that it is not the only one. The student may well understand the administrative significance, shall we say, of a Colonial Governor's despatches to the Secretary of State, but he should still be very wary of accepting as gospel truth every statement that the governor made in those despatches. The truth is, that the statements that can be inferred from archives are of two different sorts. There are those statements that can be inferred because their truth has been attested; there are those that can be inferred (with reservations) because the balance of evidence would point to their being true. If, for instance, a prospective settler makes an application to a Colonial Department of Lands to take up a pastoral leasehold, and amongst the archives of that Department there is a register showing the applications which have been received for pastoral leases, it seems to me that the student can accept, as an attested statement, without any reasonable grounds for doubt, that the applicant did, in fact, make the application, that it was received on a certain date, and (probably) that certain action followed as a result. If, however, in the course of his application,

the prospective settler made certain statements which were not in any way verified – e.g. that he wanted to raise Shorthorn cattle, that he was not the holder of any other land in the Colony, or that he had five sons who would help him develop the land – the historian might well accept these statements, too, but he will not accept them with anything like the same degree of certainty that he would if they were attested statements.

I may, of course, be making too much of this point; it may be that Jenkinson, when he referred to the “student understanding the administrative significance” of archives, had this in mind: but if this is the case, I think he should have stressed that the student needs to understand, not only the administrative significance of the archives, but also the process whereby transactions are verified in archives.

Having established, I trust, the importance of archives in historical work, I should now like to deflate any sense of importance that my historian audience may have begun to feel, by stressing the fact that archives institutions are not brought into being with historians in mind at all. The traditional archives institution is one wherein the essential records of administrative activity are preserved so that the administration itself may have reference to records of its own decisions. I believe that this is especially important in government archives institutions, and especially important in a democracy. In another place, I coined the phrase (though others may have used it long before I) that archives are “the memory of the government”. A government, or indeed any corporate body, which conducts its affairs without reference to previous decisions, without having regard to precedents, is an irresponsible one. Archives are needed so that administrators can refer to what has gone on in the past, and make decisions consistent with previous practice.

But this is not to suggest that archivists are not aware of the usefulness of archives institutions to the historian; nor is it to suggest that we can do without you. The archivist who guards his holdings against the possibility that they will be useful for administrative reference (particularly if the holdings are of a great age) and who resists the efforts of the historian to make use of them in academic research, is condemning himself to a sterile existence.¹⁰ Indeed, most archivists welcome the historian who has come to exploit his resources, and if I did not think that research uses were important I should not be giving this paper. Jenkinson divided the duties of an archivist into primary and secondary ones, and concluded that the primary ones (the physical and moral defence of archives) were of such overwhelming importance that they must occupy all the archivist’s time until they were satisfactorily accomplished; only then could the archivist devote his talents to the secondary ones, which included making archives available to the scholar. This somewhat hard-line attitude has been revised by most archivists, in particular by Ian Maclean, formerly the Chief Archivist of the Commonwealth Archives Office. In a comment on Jenkinson’s Manual

10. I have been issued with a challenge on this point. I have been asked whether any archivists do in fact develop this over-possessive attitude to the records in their care. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that at least one other archivist regarded some of his colleagues in this light. See Peter R. Eldershaw – “Security and service” A & M 2 (4) pp. 11–13 “(Some archivists) would rather see the records sealed up behind bars than have to expose them to the light, let alone to the tender mercies of students.”

interpreted in the light of Australian experience, Maclean says¹¹:

Jenkinson's distinction between the two types of use is sound; and the traditional emphasis on "defence" of the archives as a primary responsibility has been most useful during the formative years of the profession when it was necessary to protect the archives against schemes for re-arranging them to suit more or less transitory subject interests. However, to state that "defence" is the primary responsibility and "service to users" a secondary one leads inevitably to the assumption, by archivists and others, that "defence" is more important than "use". For my part I feel that, to avoid being placed in an increasingly untenable position, the archivist should restate his position. It might be much better to say that the archivist cannot discharge his ultimate responsibility to a wide variety of legitimate users (whether they be administrators or historians) unless he has first ensured that the archives are physically cared for, arranged, and presented in such a way as to preserve their essential quality as evidence of what actually happened in the course of the affairs which gave rise to them.

Not all types of archives institutions in Australia are there in order to serve the administrator. Within the last 15 years, there have been a few attempts by academics to establish institutions which are geared to serving the needs of scholars, and whose activities in providing reference services for the creators of the records they hold are secondary indeed. One of these institutions is the Archives Unit at the Research School of Social Sciences, A.N.U., for which I now work. Another is the Archives at Melbourne University. These institutions are scarcely archives at all in the traditional sense. Conventional archivists, and especially librarians, look upon them as bastard or bodgie institutions. Though I would hesitate to attribute to Professor N.G. Butlin the fathering of anything illegitimate, it should be stated that to him (when he was Mr. Butlin, Reader in Economic History in the Economics Department of the Research School of Social Sciences) the A.N.U. Archives owes its existence. His aim in setting up an Archives Unit was outlined in a letter to the then Director of the School, dated 23 May 1957.¹²

. . . our aim should be to establish a nucleus, not a monopoly, of private records so that our staff and scholars could make, substantially from records on the site, significant and authoritative contributions in the main aspects of Australian history.

The collection was inaugurated, therefore, to enable scholars to carry out original research work, and because there was little evidence that established libraries were doing much about bringing together business archives of essential value in the study of Australian history, especially economic history. The failure of the libraries was especially notable in their neglect of records of the latter part of the 19th Century, and the

11. Ian Maclean in "An analysis of Jenkinson's 'Manual of Archive Administration' in the light of Australian experience", in *Essays in memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, edited for the Society of Archivists by A.E.J. Hollaender, 1962, p. 130.
12. Correspondence file 2A1 in A.N.U. Archives

20th. Melbourne University Archives was established for much the same reasons. Frank Strahan says:¹³.

The University of Melbourne, faced with plans to develop research, saw that it was necessary to establish a repository to ensure that sources would be available to its scholars. Both to avoid clashing with established Victorian repositories and, more significantly, in response to the realisation by academics that records of the activities of businesses and businessmen were neglected, yet were highly rich and influential sources of historical information, the University decided to specialise in business records.

Thus the two types of archives institutions - those that care for the records of the government or other organisation to which they belong, to the exclusion or near-exclusion of all other types of records - and those that collect records not irrespective of their source, but at least with a wide coverage in mind and guided by research programmes. Ironically, the traditional collectors of historical manuscripts, the State Libraries and National Libraries, really have more in common with the university archives institutions than they do with the government archives departments. Libraries, too, cast their nets wide, and seek to bring into their custody research material irrespective of whether or not it was created by the organisations which govern them. For this reason, of course, most of the conflict that has occurred has been between, not the traditional archivist and the brash, ambitious new university archivist, but between the latter and the librarian.

Not all aspects of the collecting work of university archives institutions have followed with single minded devotion the research interests of scholars. Archives institutions are a little like revolutions - it takes a brilliant man to start one, but requires more than a genius to influence its course once one has begun. Depositor's wishes must be observed, to quote what is quite a cliché in circles where archives collecting policy is discussed; what is more, if an institution is to follow research interests of scholars, logically once those interests have moved away from a field one ought to dispose of all the records that were collected in pursuance of that subject interest. This is quite impossible. Furthermore, though these archives institutions are not established for the sake of preserving the records of businesses so that administrative reference may be made to them, this service must be offered to prospective depositors. It would be a hopeless labour indeed to set out to convince a business that its records ought to be deposited in an institution which would refuse to answer any question, no matter how urgent, that the depositor addressed to the new custodian of the records. Even university archives institutions accept a continuing responsibility with respect to the depositor, and cannot abandon that policy merely because Professor X has lost all interest in the manufacture of horse-shoes in favour of a consuming passion for information on the importation of pornography.

The dilemma of the university archivist in trying to keep track of research interests is paralleled to some extent in the conventional archivist. For research

13. Frank Strahan in "Melbourne University Archives" in Archives and Manuscripts 3 (2) May 1966, p. 18

interests add life blood to an archives institution, giving it a sense of purpose and establishing a bond between academic and archivist. But this bond is likely to be broken at short notice by the historian; much of the early enthusiasm of archivists is devoted to enabling the Ph.D. scholar find the research materials he needs; Ph.D scholars have a habit, however, of abandoning all interest in research, or at least in research in a local institution, once they have been able to add those priceless initials to the list of degrees which follow their names. There are exceptions to these tendencies, of course, and some of my listeners are bound to take exception to what I am saying. It is generally true, however, that interest in archives on the part of the Australian scholar is a manifestation of his early struggles to climb the ladder that will lead him to preferment. Once he achieves this desirable objective, he tends to “despise the base degrees by which he did ascend”. The result is that the archivist can very rarely call upon professors and other leading academics in his campaign for better archival facilities, or, more to the point, in his struggle to cast off the librarianly yoke.

Coupled with this sense of frustration at the seeming indifference of senior academics, is the realisation that academic people have a one-track mind towards, not only archives, but also historical research. It is useless to try to enthuse the expert on transportation respecting the need for records of land alienation to be rescued; it is worse than useless to try to summon up some enthusiasm for administrative history in the political or constitutional historian. But if archives, particularly public archives, are to be used to the full, that is, with understanding, administrative histories must be written. Inventories of records, taking a record group as a basis, cannot be prepared unless some form of administrative history is written. In only one State of Australia is there available a comprehensive administrative history of that State’s public authorities. In most Australian States it is impossible to consult even a thorough-going history of the Colonial Secretary’s Office or the Governor’s Office.

Even the specialised work that is done on the archives of Australian governments is seldom made available to the archivist. In how many States, for instance, is it the rule that a student or scholar completing a piece of academic research on the basis of archival source materials must place a copy in the archives institution from which he received help?

You will long ago have concluded that this sorry catalogue of archival grievances is some form of smoke screen which I have raised in an effort to prevent historians from discovering the inadequacies of Australian archival provision. This certainly was not my intention. For I believe that, in a relatively short time, archivists have established a worth-while system of control for the main public archives groups in Australia, and have done a great deal to bring together, and make available for use, a wealth of business and trade union archives. And this has been done, in many cases, in spite of the indifference (and even outright opposition) of those librarians who have concluded that, though archives should come under their jurisdiction, nothing should be done to improve the status of the archival profession and little to improve the conditions under which archives are accommodated.

Plans for production of archival finding aids have languished, partly because

the administrative histories, whose importance I stressed above, have not been written. In 1954 archivists assembled in Canberra under the fatherly eye of the late Dr. T.R. Schellenberg, of the National Archives in Washington, and solemnly decided upon launching a Guide to Pre-Federation Archives. The only States which have made a substantial contribution to this work have been New South Wales and Tasmania, though by way of explanation I should say that at the time, and for five years following, one State, Queensland, did not even have an archives institution for State records, or a State Archivist.

Many of the larger projects for the utilisation of archival source materials have been launched by librarians, and some of them have suffered because they did not avail themselves of the special knowledge of archivists. Perhaps the best (or worst) example is the Joint Copying Project, a scheme whereby 4000 reels of microfilm have been copied, and positives made available to contributing libraries in all States. The copying has been done, primarily, in the Public Record Office in London, though many other archival materials relating to Australia have already been included in the project, and more will be copied. It is very hard to find published information on the project written by the pens of the historians of this country. The best description of the difficulties of using this material is from the hand of an archivist (admittedly, an archivist who has now turned academic), Mr. H.J. Gibbney.¹⁴ In selecting Public Record Office classes for microfilming, and in determining the order in which individual classes would be copied, those responsible for the scheme seem to have made the task of completing a useable guide or handbook ever so much more difficult. The National Library has for some years been engaged on the preparation of a Handbook for the Joint Copying Project, but unfortunately that Library has suffered repeated reversals, in losing staff at the critical moment and in having to be responsible for so many projects of a similar nature.

Another project which has excited a great deal of interest in Australia is the Mander Jones Guide to Manuscripts in the United Kingdom and Ireland relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. This is not a copying project though there are obvious links with the Joint Copying Project. It is a program by which information is compiled about the location of historical source materials the originals of which are held in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland and which relate to the history of Australia and the Pacific area.¹⁵ In this instance, historians deserve credit for having brought it into existence, for it was launched on the initiative of the History Department, R.S.S.S., A.N.U., and in collaboration with the National Library. I understand that the Guide is in the hands of the A.N.U. press at the moment.

It has occurred to some of us, however, that it is strange that we have, or soon will have, a guide to manuscripts relating to Australia the originals of which are in the British Isles, but we have no corresponding guide to source materials which are held

14. H.J. Gibbney - "Problems of the Australian Joint Copying Project", in Archives and Manuscripts 3 (2) May 1966, pp 3-6.

15. There are several references to this Guide in Archives and Manuscripts, 2 (7) Nov 1964, pp 3-9; 3 (1) Nov 1965, pp 28-29; 3 (4) May 1967, pp 23-26 4 (3) Nov 1970, pp 5-13.

in Australia. I do not refer to those research materials that are in archival or library custody, but to the many fonds of records which are still in the care of their creating bodies, or in private hands. The British have their Historical Manuscripts Commission and National Register of Archives, and other countries have similar projects. It seems to me that great benefit would accrue from a project, launched on the part of historians, and drawing into its planning and execution the special skills of archivists, to compile a guide to research material for historians and social scientists which is not yet in the custody of recognised libraries and archives institutions.

One of the criticisms that can be made of Australian archival and scholarly projects in the collection, description and utilisation of primary source materials is that the solutions have been formulated for particular problems, but there has been no over-all planning. Academic historians are notoriously independent in outlook, and archivists have followed in the wake of the latest scholarly enthusiasm, being glad to pick up what crumbs are available from the study table. Copying schemes have been instituted in various study areas, but it seems to me that no-one has looked at the whole question of the availability of resources, and set out to find solutions which put first things first. The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau has been described as a "unique project in library co-operation on an international scale". It was set up within the Research School of Pacific Studies at the A.N.U., being sponsored by that University, and the Mitchell Library, the National Library of Australia, the National Library of New Zealand and the Library of the University of Hawaii. As its executive officer, Robert Langdon, says:-¹⁶

The primary aim of the Bureau is to locate unpublished documents of value on the Pacific Islands and to obtain copies of them on microfilm for deposit in its member libraries. The Pacific Islands in this context means all the islands of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia, including Hawaii and New Guinea, but excluding New Zealand.

These schemes, and ones like the A.N.U. Archives project to copy records of the various State Trades and Labor Councils, again using microfilm, have made a considerable contribution to the availability of source material which is necessary for scholarly research. Co-ordination and overall planning must, apparently, come later.

The troubled times through which we archivists live have been described and the causes of our difficulties analysed, by a number of observers, many of whom have been too close to the scene to claim to any great objectivity. Reforms suggested by archival activists may well be suspect; but the diagnosis of our troubles by a reformed archivist merits close attention. Again, I rely upon my friend and A.N.U. colleague, Mr. H.J. Gibbney who, on abandoning the archival world for the more leisurely pursuits of a scholar on the staff of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, adumbrated some of the difficulties of the profession he was leaving. Mr. Gibbney said:¹⁷ "It is fairly obvious, I think, that many of our troubles stem from the fact

16. R. Langdon - "The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau", in Archives and Manuscripts 3 (8) May 1968, pp 16-23.

17. H.J. Gibbney in "Reflections on Australian archives" Papers of the 13th Biennial Conference of the L.A.A. Canberra, 1965.

that we are a numerically small profession, which has been placed under the wing of a larger one in the belief that we are thereby given wider opportunities". I do not know whether or not there is a solution for this problem of the smallness of the archival profession. It has certainly not been helped by the association of archivists with librarians (with the librarians, of course, always on top) in the employment situation. It has meant that an archivist cannot look for advancement beyond a certain level in his employment situation; in most State Libraries, the Chief Archivist may be able to earn as much as the Head Cataloguer. In some States, he is placed in subordination, not only to the State Librarian and the Deputy, but also to some sort of Divisional Librarian. At one stage I exchanged correspondence in the Australian Library Journal with the State Librarian of South Australia, the burden of my protest being that South Australia's senior archivist was subordinated to a reference librarian. The State Librarian made a vigorous rejoinder. I had not read the information aright. The senior archivist was not subject to the control of a reference librarian, but to that of a Divisional Librarian, Reference Services. Historians are good at drawing fine distinctions, but the palm goes to a librarian when it comes to distinctions without differences.

In a seminar paper which I delivered at the A.N.U. I had the following to say about the way in which the archivist casts an occasional envious glance at the academic life:

The archivist is on the fringe of the academic world, but he does not expect fringe benefits. On the other hand the historian cannot blame him for occasionally looking somewhat wistfully over the fence: the academic world seems to offer others that wonderful opportunity which he can only speculate about; that is, the prospect of spending his life in devotion to pure research. The proximity of so much unworked resource material makes it difficult for the archivist to turn to the less dramatic work of sorting series and preparing inventories. Most archivists are historians manqué and it seems to me to be pointless to regret this fact.¹⁸

Rather than grumble at archivists who are frustrated historians, perhaps the academic historian should decide to do something about the depressed state of Australian archives. A concerted attempt by Australian historians to urge upon Australian governments the need to establish a proper recognition of the archival profession would surely be accorded respect. To begin with, historians could join in submitting proposals for the separation of archives from library board control. As a second step, something could be done about the vexed question of training for archivists. It has been suggested, for instance, that a course-work M.A., to be taken by both historians and archivists, might improve both the training of archivists and the preparation of

18. The reference to an archivist as an historian manqué comes from Roger H. Ellis "The British Archivist and his Society" in Journal of the Society of Archivists, III (2) Oct 1965, p. 46. Mr. Ellis, having been schooled in the British tradition of Hilary Jenkinson, is of a different view from the present writer. He says:—

An historian or researcher manqué will never make a true archivist, and there is still too much misunderstanding of this matter.

It might be commented, of course, that the archival profession is much larger and more mature in Britain than it is in Australia, and is not subordinated to librarians.

academics for advanced research work. There is a great deal that is common ground to both archivist and historical scholar, including historical methodology, an understanding of the nature of archives, and a knowledge of the relevant sources. Finally I believe that archivists, like historians, need opportunities for overseas study. While facilities for training in this country are yet so rudimentary, and lessons to be learned from overseas could with great advantage be applied to this country, there seems to be a very good case for the provision of some form of study leave for archivists. I would suggest that this might well be a cause which historians could take up in an effort to improve the lot of those on whose labours they depend.

I have quoted before from an article written by George Rudé. Let me conclude by referring again to that article. Professor Rudé says:¹⁹

. . . . the partnership between historian and archivist is often an extremely fruitful one; and it is a pity that the archivists's contribution to a joint enterprise so frequently goes unrecognised, while the historian hogs the limelight from what emerges from their labour in common.

I have hogged the limelight in this session organised and attended by historians, and you will question the truth of what Professor Rudé says. It is a rare occasion, however, for seldom does an archivist have the opportunity of putting before a group of those scholars whose work he most respects a statement of what he thinks is most important to their understanding of his craft. In seeking to make that statement I have at times been outrageous, and at times impertinent. But I should like the audience to know that my main concern has been to plead for co-operation between the two professions, and if even the smallest co-operative venture ensues I shall think my temerity has been well worth the effort.

19. G. Rudé – loc. cit