

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

When Mr Allan Horton kindly gave me a copy of Mr Graeme Powell's "Origins of the Australian Joint Copying Project" (*A. & M.* November 1971) I read it as a NSW participant in the events leading immediately to it. May I therefore be allowed some comment, unfortunately after publication, because I was not consulted before, as others were. Earlier copying leading to the Joint Copying Project (JCP) also led up to the present NSW Archives, and in this respect has been recently treated in Mr Russell Doust's M Lib thesis on these archives.

For students there is value in Powell's balanced study, but my experience with beginners has been of many already with convictions that the National Library of Australia (NLA) organised copying and allowed or persuaded the Mitchell Library (ML) to join in, and also that the ML and the Public Library of New South Wales (PLNSW) were separate institutions. Some preliminary clarification may be needed for students, increasingly younger than the JCP itself. Powell's use of the term Mitchell Library Trustees is confusing, though he explains (Note 53) that there is no body so-called, because the ML and its endowment were and are in what was first the Sydney Free Public Library, then the PLNSW, and since 1969 the Library of NSW. The corporate body was a Board of Trustees, now called a Council and Councillors, and its chief officer a Principal Librarian. There was a Mitchell Committee of the Trustees and a Mitchell Librarian, but whilst of course considering recommendations and being influenced by Mitchell Committee members, the Board and the Principal Librarian decided policy and action on the JCP as it developed. Mr Powell's note 32 may suggest that the Australian Section of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library (CPL) had a change of name to Commonwealth National Library in 1923 and another to National Library of Australia in 1960. But this was a new institution established by statute, independent of the CPL and taking over the JCP when it ceased to be controversial. PLNSW dealings were with the Librarian of Parliament, Mr Kenneth Binns, and indirectly with the Parliament's Library Committee, and its Chairman, the Speaker, or the President of the Senate.

Powell explains the early interest of the PLNSW in copying for ML, with endowment income to pay for it, whereas CPL or rather Binns's interest was later, about 1938, when he hoped for the resumption of the CPL's records publication (*Historical records of Australia*), taken over about 1912, when the ML had the first wing of the present Library of NSW building and was active. Binns was CPL Deputy when *Records* publication lapsed in 1926, becoming Librarian in 1928; but he had been concerned with the *Records* and had already become critical of PLNSW and particularly of its Principal Librarian Ifould, because earlier copying, the Bonwick transcripts, and other material, had not been transferred to the CPL with the *Records* publication, as he thought they should have been. Original papers and the Bonwick PRO transcripts were of course in manuscript; later copying was in typescript; both could be done by different individuals for different persons or institutions, and selective copying was assumed. But about 1935 there came technical changes in copying possibilities, and emerging archival thinking about total copying of PRO series relating to Australia, and with these

developments duplicated or rival copying in the same institution began to raise questions of space for equipment, power for lighting, and technical operators. This was when I came in, with events beginning to lead to what might be called a comedy or even a farce in camera.

Out of Sydney University's Fisher Library, as Binns had been, I became an assistant in the General Reference Department of the PLNSW in 1923; and was also attempting post-graduate research in Australian history. By 1932 when I was made Deputy Principal I had ideas about copying, and was aware of Burrow's pioneer work in the Fisher in microfilm photography. Powell says simply that in 1912 Watson, the trustee who was Acting Principal Librarian, was passed over for Ifould for the permanent appointment; but Ifould as an experienced librarian, already Principal Librarian in South Australia, and at 35 the best offering in Australia, was "preferred" by the Minister for Education, not by the Trustees; and they in 1932 were opposed to the new position of Deputy and to my appointment to it. Especially those who could be called Mitchell or Mitchell-minded trustees, were not amused when in 1934 I received a Carnegie travel grant, for work in the local public library field. As Powell says I studied overseas progress in photocopying and brought back microfilm negatives out of the PRO. These were made for me, for my own historical studies, but helped me in studying the PRO, so that I could and did report on methods and order of copying on my return. My stated conclusions were that British archives relating to Australia should be "available in Australia in their entirety and in facsimile", which photostat, true photostat and "the miniature camera and film projection made increasingly possible", but I did not mean that large scale copying could be done by miniature cameras of the Leica kind. I also said that copies should have "the arrangement and form of reference of the originals" and finally suggested "as a possibility, however remote it may appear at present, cooperation between the States and the Commonwealth, and possibly New Zealand". I think my microfilms may have been the first of Australian material overseas, and this the first joint copying, and total copying proposal.

My report aroused interest in the choice between photostat and microfilm with conservative trustee preference for the former, not as much for more certain endurance, as for direct readability, and without realization of storage problems of original size copying, even still selective. But in any case I was not acceptable as an authority on the ML, to some extent influential minds were closed to suggestions from me on total copying and archival treatment, which were somewhat premature in 1935 with whatever goodwill. Even in 1939 a vital part of the proposal of the most interested trustees was the Mitchell Librarian going overseas even for years "to select papers for copying". And even later the Hon. T.D. Mutch, an able man, had to explain total copying to himself with the metaphor of mining to a face.

Ifould was, as Powell says, under pressures, but he played his own Fabian game, convinced Binns couldn't get money. Sometime not long after 1935 he poured scorn on the sovereign Commonwealth of Australia for taking a comparatively small sum of money from a foreign corporation, the Carnegie Corporation, to help develop its inadequate territorial library services, but, expostulated Binns, "The Treasury wouldn't give me the money". The time was still a

quarter of a century ahead when the Treasury would make a much larger special grant for one small non-Australian collection in the new national library.

However, on receiving a PLNSW genuine offer for a joint project Binns admitted he had instructed White, in effect, to go ahead unilaterally in London; he urged delay. But, as Powell says, though he spoke of “cooperation” and “free discussion” he clearly hoped that the “National Library” (then still the CPL) “would secure the sole right . . . although he was ready to provide positives to the Mitchell Library and any State Libraries that required them”. White, as Binns’s deputy, does seem to have made satisfactory photocopying arrangements, and “made a formal application to film PRO documents”. But Powell doesn’t say what answer he got, and despite conferences the PLNSW and the CPL could not agree on mutually acceptable terms for cooperation. The former reaffirmed its proposal for joint copying; through the Australian High Commission the CPL completed its arrangements to begin copying. One of the states’ difficulties was that they hadn’t any benefit of the Westminster Statute which made it difficult if not constitutionally impossible for the British national government not to accept any advice of the Australian national government on any matter affecting Australia, unless perhaps it was clearly constitutionally *ultra vires*. And I quite clearly remember the political pressures we had to exert from NSW to get papers which we had spent money to find, and had promised to us by a British department, when the final offer was formally made to the Commonwealth; this was about 1935 or 36. But in September 1939 the comedy was becoming tragic, and the ‘deus ex machina’ on our side was the god of war himself.

In 1944 before the War was over in Europe the CPL had a Liaison Officer, in effect instructed to arrange to start copying as soon as some records were back in London. But then the comedy in camera began. A start could not be made because there were no longer the same copying facilities White had been able to arrange. And we had our own Liaison Officer, no less a person than our President, Dr Evatt. Not knowing what was going on we sought permission to copy, but still being prepared to cooperate; this was in April 1945, before the Japanese surrender in September, and even before the formal end of the war in Europe in May. Evatt then learned of Binns’s efforts at a *fait accompli* through his Liaison Officer, who was supposed to have got into the PRO with a camera in his hand and taken satisfactory negative strips, but our requests to be shown these weren’t met. Mutch, writing to Rosevear, the Speaker and Chairman of the CPL Committee, on 6 June 1945, would hardly have said nothing more than that Ifould had looked into microcopying overseas in 1936; for one thing they were old Labor colleagues (Powell, p.22). I was Principal Librarian from 1942 on; Powell says I met Binns in July 1945, “in an effort to improve strained relations”, but this must have been mutual, and we were able to draft an agreement. Then in October that year Mutch and I met White, acting for Binns about to leave for America, and there was another agreement drawn up, as Powell says, but it was only different to the extent of an added clause that Binns would buy a satisfactory camera in America. It seems clear that politicians in power had taken a hand; and there had been a change of government in the War with a composition more our way, again more by chance than by good management. Powell says we “finally” met White; but we didn’t; we finally met the Speaker, and Chairman of the CPL Committee, Mr Rosevear, obviously expecting to hear what he expected.

It had seemed for a while that first in with satisfactory equipment and copying arrangements would be first, and last, served, but for us joint copying included sharing of copying facilities; if Binns had a change of heart or was prevented by higher authority from having his own camera and sole entry, we secured what we had proposed in 1939; we had not lost.

However, though getting the copying done was of course the prime objective, we thought, rightly or wrongly, that genuine cooperation, not just condescending handout, was something worthwhile, for all the States. And not only in this but also in other matters. In copying we were in a special position, of obligations to Mitchell's truly national benefaction, and because of that also in a position to take issue with the Commonwealth in the way we did. But this obscured the more basic question. Other States saw the conflict as one between two big brothers, or saw the Commonwealth as neutral, and a likely source of messes of potage. E.R. Pitt of the Public Library of Victoria once exclaimed in conference "A plague on both your houses!" But there were two related problems, one of genuine co-operation between libraries, and one of getting especially the major libraries in conference. Before the rise of the university libraries we had some success in organising conferences of the States and the Commonwealth as equals, along with library association conferences, and the PLNSW and the CPL remained in conference not only on the copying issue, and on the final organising of copying between 1945 and 48. One more or less related problem was that of a national bibliographical centre, for which the Commonwealth wanted State support, but not participation, and we wrangled on this. Then one day G.C. Remington said the agenda was getting a bit thin and repetitive, could I think of something new. I then remembered that Australia had not put into effect the UNESCO statute for what it called National Bibliographical Commissions. I drafted a submission which included argument for a major role for the library association, which was becoming the LAA out of the Australian Institute of Librarians; there was resistance on the general principle and on detail, in long motion by motion fights; we lost on the LAA issue, because one of the difficulties was that the Commonwealth most disliked competition of other national bodies; but we got established what was developed into the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services (AACOBS), widened into a general major library conference not restricted to bibliography.

Going back finally to joint copying, a Mitchell Librarian became an assistant in it but she was Miss Mander Jones, who had succeeded Miss Leeson. On the record Binns looks something like the villain of the piece, though he thought Ifould was, from way back. He looks like a villain largely because of the hole in a corner and secretive methods he used, but this was largely because of the years he went through with little support for what he lived for, an eventual, real national library, and the Commonwealth hegemony which he thought should go with this. He showed this in an attempt to keep NSW, some other states, and the LAA, out of the arrangements for McColvin's visit. But whilst he was arrogant and aggrandising for the Commonwealth he wasn't for himself, or with any delusions of grandeur about himself. Off our high horses we usually got on well together, and in retrospect it is for him and for Mutch on our side that I feel most respect and affection. For both life ended with less than their deservings.

John Metcalfe.

Sir,

My attention has been drawn to the paper by Michael Piggott, "At the drawing board: problems in the professional education of the archivist", in your issue for November 1971, pp. 35-42.

On pp. 26-27 it is said that "an honours arts degree with Latin and Medieval French had become the only acceptable qualification for admission to this School . . . We noted above that the English schools insisted that their entrants be fluent in Latin and Medieval French . . . Language prerequisites – at least in the case of Britain – reflect the nature of archival material found in British repositories".

An honours arts degree with Latin and Medieval French has never been a requirement in this School nor, to my knowledge, in any of the other three schools. Until recently we required a first or second class honours degree in Arts but this could be in any subject. We required a knowledge of Latin to Advanced level (though we did not ask for a formal A level qualification). As for Medieval French, I do not know how an applicant could possibly have achieved that standard, unless he had, rather exceptionally, included this subject with his university degree course. In this School Medieval Latin and Anglo-Norman French (not just Medieval French) were amongst the lecture courses, and featured in the Diploma examinations, but I do not think that these languages were taught or examined at the other schools. In this School Anglo-Norman French became a rarely-chosen option in 1965 and was abolished in 1970.

On p. 31, note 22, it is said that "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". But the requirement that a year's work in a repository should be carried out before the award of the Diploma was abolished in 1967, and the requirement that a "thesis" should be submitted (which had no necessary connexion with the year's practical work) was abolished in 1965.

Our whole syllabus was radically revised with effect from the 1970/71 session, and I enclose a copy of our current syllabus, and an insert, which will give you an idea of what we now teach \*. Here I will point out only

1. that we now accept honours graduates in any subject, not only in Arts;
2. that our 14 options include Information Studies, which involves work with computers;
3. that effectively our options, which may be freely chosen, divide into three streams, one to suit the "traditional" UK archivist who

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must still master Medieval subjects, one to suit modern archivists, and one to suit archivists from overseas. In the last category we have had students from Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Pakistan, Turkey and elsewhere. In the coming year we hope to have one from Australia.

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