

NATIONAL ARCHIVES of PAPUA NEW GUINEA

His Excellency the Governor-General, the Right Honourable Sir Paul Hasluck, G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., K.St.J., opened the new building of the National Archives of Papua and New Guinea on 20 April 1972.

Various measures have been taken to preserve and organise the records of Papua New Guinea. As far back as 1905, Government Secretary, Anthony Musgrave attempted to arrange the British New Guinea Protectorate Papers 1884-1888.

It was not until 1957 that an archives repository was established in the Territory but its emphasis was clearly upon record management. Necessity for this resulted from destruction of records mainly during World War II.

The worst destruction of records occurred in New Guinea following the Japanese invasion and Allied war action. There virtually all the records were lost; Papua, however, fared better with some records surviving in Port Moresby and others in Australia where they were sent for safe-keeping in 1942-1943.

Post-war, those records considered to be of value to the re-established civil administration (the Provisional Administration of Papua and New Guinea), were returned to Port Moresby while the rest of those sent to Australia were placed in the custody of the Commonwealth Archives Office in Canberra. In addition, other records (of the Papuan Administration, the post-war Administration of the combined Territories plus a small number of files of the pre-war New Guinea Administration), were transferred to Canberra in 1951 and 1955. The Commonwealth Archives Office came to provide the major archival function for the official records of the Territory at that stage.

A survey of the records in the Territory was made in 1955 by Mr H.J. Gibbney of the Commonwealth Archives Office. As a result of his survey, it was decided to implement a records management programme to systematise the ever-increasing body of official files and records.

In 1959, Mr V.W. Prescott became the first Records Officer/Archivist for the Territory. The basement of the old European Hospital building (part of the present-day House of Assembly), was converted for use as an archives repository and there the archives in this country have remained until now.

Besides implementing the records management programme, Mr Prescott painstakingly collected considerable quantities of pre-war records, including records of value historically from 'out-stations' along the Papuan coast, as well as records of historical value from the post-war Administration.

With the growing volume and importance of the records in Port Moresby, the question arose whether to incorporate them with the collection at the Commonwealth Archives in Canberra or whether to return the Canberra collection to Port Moresby. Facilitated by the extensive work of listing of material available, researchers and scholars were increasingly making use of the Port Moresby archives.

In 1962, it was decided the records of the Territory should be transferred from Canberra. However, prior to their transfer, they were micro-filmed to be integrated with other records now held in the National Archives, Canberra. In addition, it was decided to establish an Archival Authority of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea separate from the Commonwealth Archives Office. Mr Prescott became the Territory's first Chief Archivist until his resignation in 1966. He was succeeded by the present Chief Archivist, Mr Kevin Green.

A new building to house the Archives had been suggested at various times but 1970 saw its detailed planning. About the same time, plans for the future development of Port Moresby laid down proposals for a new town centre in the Waigani area. In this new centre, a site was allocated for the National Archives Building.

The National Archives of Papua New Guinea is a valuable achievement – its new building a reality. Here permanently housed and integrated, the records of the history of Papua New Guinea may remain preserved, ever-growing and readily accessible to the people of this land and others to serve this nation of the future.

(The information in this note was taken from a brochure issued at the time of the opening, and is here reproduced by kind permission of the Chief Archivist, Mr Kevin Green.)