

SOME COMMENTS ON 'RECORD TYPES'

by K. Green

The aim of this article is to examine one aspect of the titling of archival series – the terms used to denote the type of record. The task of providing appropriate series titles perhaps ranks next in importance to the determination of the series itself; and within the series title the type of record is assumed to be of significance to “indicate what administrative actions are reflected in the series”.⁽¹⁾ This would seem to suggest that the various record types can be defined fairly rigorously. It is this consideration that I wish to examine in this article.

The obvious starting point for a consideration of record types would be a compilation of a list of terms used in existing series titles. The National Archives (U.S.A.) Staff Information Circular No. 14 on the preparation of preliminary inventories provides a list of 88 terms which “illustrate most of the types of records that are identified in existing preliminary inventories”.⁽²⁾ Australian archivists in 1954 used this list as a basis of its list of 99 terms stated to indicate “some of” innumerable types for the *General Instructions for the Preparation of a Guide to Australian Public Archives of the Pre-Federation Period*. It is now almost 20 years since Australian archivists met at the seminar on Archives Management in Canberra and agreed to Dr Schellenberg's suggestion for a Guide to Pre-Federation Archives – the idea of producing preliminary inventories (certainly on the timetable suggested) has proved impracticable; and, it seems, the list of series types and the various suggestions on their use forgotten or ignored. I have therefore compiled a list of record type terms identified from a small number of Australian published (and unpublished) finding aids which give series titles. As I have compiled this list over a period of six or seven years I cannot claim that I have been consistent in extracting record type terms.

Although more than one quarter of the terms in the American list do not appear to have been used in Australian Finding Aids, I have identified over 180 terms in the lists examined. There would appear to be some laxity in the application of terms – certainly I am unsure of what I intended by some of the terms I had used in series lists which I prepared when working at the Australian National University Archives. (And as many of the lists which I prepared have not been superseded, I can hardly expect the staff currently employed at the A.N.U. Archives – or, more importantly, the researchers – to be able to interpret my “record types” and thus gain some indication of the administrative actions reflected in the series.) Similarly, I am at a loss to understand what is meant by some of the terms used by others. Perhaps this is due to the lack of any definition of terms in their application to archives. To compound the problem, most Australian archives are too small and/or too busy to be able to edit series titles to ensure consistency and precision in the use of record type terms. A particular problem is that in some cases no attempt has been made to select a term which would reflect administrative action; instead the term used refers to the physical form of the series described. Book (and some, though not all, of the terms incorporating the word “book”), documents, press cuttings (or clippings), file, blueprint, butt or counterfoil, form, record are examples of physical description of the series rather than the administrative action.

It would appear desirable to produce a standard list of terms in such a way as to indicate the administrative action reflected. Not only would this assist in determining the appropriate record type, but could provide the basis for grouping of series according to record type. What follows is my compiled list (and no doubt there are some terms used which I have not noted) with some comments which I hope will provoke consideration of the titles which we, as archivists, give to record series.

FOOTNOTES

1. *General Instructions for the Preparation of a Guide to Australian Public Archives of the Pre-Federation Period*. Instructions for the Preparation of Inventories, Canberra, 1954, p.4.
2. The National Archives (U.S.A.) Staff Information Circular No. 14, p.5.

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
ABSTRACTS	Same as "summary".
ACCOUNTS	(1) Record of assets, liabilities, etc. = "ledger"? (2) Statement of mutual dealings between two parties.
ADDRESSES	Same as "speeches".
ADDRESS BOOK	One of a number of terms including the word "book" which is really a description of the physical form - I would suggest "directory" as an alternative.
ADJUDICATIONS	One of several words indicating legal judgements given ("awards", "findings", "judgements").
AFFIDAVITS	As to the information that an "affidavit" provides it is no different from a statement; an affidavit differs from a "statement" in that it must be signed voluntarily before a person competent to administer an oath. Is there any significance in the absence of the term "affirmation" in any finding aid?
AGENDA	A list of items to be dealt with at a meeting.
AGREEMENTS	Seems to be commonly used as being equivalent to "contracts".
ALLOTMENTS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
ANALYSIS	Doubtful as a record type.
ANNOUNCEMENTS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
ANNUITIES	An annuity is a payment - it would be necessary to determine the appropriate record type in which payments of annuities are recorded. "Register of annuities"?
APPEALS	Is "appeals" a record type? Whilst this term is included in the National Archives list it appears only once in Australian lists which I examined. Probably "Notice of Appeal" would be a better designation.
APPLICATIONS	A special type of "inward letters"?
APPOINTMENTS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
ARTICLES (OF AGREEMENT-SEAMEN)	
ARTICLES (OF ASSOCIATION)	
ARTICLES (OF APPRENTICESHIP)	
ARTICLES (OF CLERKSHIP)	
ARTICLES (OF PARTNERSHIP)	These are "contracts" or "agreements".
AUDITS	Doubtful as a record type; but "audit working papers" does appear to have a definite meaning to denote the collection of recorded information concerning a given audit.
AUTHORISATIONS	Doubtful as a record type.
AWARDS	See "adjudications".
BALANCE SHEETS (BOOK)	Statements in summarised form of the balances in ledger accounts.

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
BANK PASS BOOK	Another of these terms incorporating the term "book". A "bank pass book" is the customer's copy of his account in the bank's ledger. "Bank statement" (a term which is sometimes used as a record type) is similar.
BIDS	One of only three terms in the National Archives list which was not included in the General Instructions . Nor does it appear to have been used in the Australian context, although it does have a meaning in commercial practice which would suggest that it could be an appropriate record type. Colloquial term for an "invoice".
BILLS BILLS (OF LADING) BILLS (OF COST) BILLS (OF EXCHANGE) BILLS (OF SALE) BILLS (OF HEALTH)	Statements either descriptive or financial with definite usage particularly in relation to shipping and customs procedures.
BLUE BOOKS	A term included in the list in the General Instructions but not apparently used.
BLUEPRINTS	Refers to the process by which copy is made, therefore hardly appropriate as a record type.
BONDS	A contract under seal to pay a sum.
BOOKS	Physical description – not a record type.
BRIEFS	Instructions by a solicitor to a barrister.
BULLETINS	Short official statements
BUTTS (COUNTERFOILS)	Physical description – not a record type.
CABLES	Message. The distinctiveness relates to the means by which the message is transmitted.
CALENDAR	Specific archives use; perhaps the term should be reserved for that usage and not as a general record type.
CANCELLATIONS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
CANCELLED APPLICATIONS	See "applications".
CASH BOOKS	A basic book of account, strangely the term is not in the National Archives list.
CATALOGUE	One of many forms of listings (more specialised perhaps).
CERTIFICATES	A document formally attesting a fact.
CHARTS	(1) Sea map (2) Graph?
CIRCULARS	Notice reproduced for circulation.
CLAIMS	Doubtful as a record type.
CLIPPINGS (CUTTINGS)	Refers to the physical form and the act of compiling the cuttings.
CODE BOOK	In one example noted the term "dictionary" was used in the series title whereas the description made reference to "code book".
COMMENTS	Explanatory notes.
COMMISSIONS	= order?
COMMUNICATIONS	So very general as to be meaningless.
COMPLAINTS	Statements of fact by an aggrieved person.

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
CONTRACTS	Agreements legally enforceable.
CONTRIBUTION BOOKS	Likely to be a "cash receipts journal".
CONVEYANCE	= grant?
COPY BOOK (PRESS COPY BOOK)	Refers to the fact that it is a copy – or the method of making the copy. Usually an outward letter book – but could be some other type of record.
CORRESPONDENCE	Has particular usage in Archives context to mean both inward and outward letters (and sometimes internal notes).
COVENANT	Contract under seal.
DAY BOOK	Term used often enough and has definite meaning as a book of original entry – it is likely to be either a "cash receipts journal", "cash payment journal" or both (i.e. a "cash book"). Miss Doreen Wheeler of the A.N.U. Archives has found an interesting variation – one union which apparently transacts its financial business at night has labelled its book "Night Book".
DECISIONS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
DECLARATIONS	There are a number of specific declarations in commercial use.
DEEDS	A sealed instrument (as with "covenant") affecting legal deposition.
DEPOSITION	Sworn evidence.
DESCRIPTIONS	A rather imprecise term and doubtful as a record type.
DESPATCHES	Official communication on State affairs.
DESIGN	Preliminary sketch.
DETAILS	Presumably used to denote drawings of details.
DIAGRAMS	A sketch showing the feature of an object.
DIARIES	Daily record of events = journal, n.b. an account written in the form of a diary not contemporaneously is not a diary.
DICTIONARY	The only actual use was to refer to a "code book".
DIGEST	Almost equivalent to "summary".
DIPLOMAS	Appears to be used in the more narrow sense of a document conferring honour or privilege rather than the older definition of an official document or State paper.
DIRECTIVES	= "instructions".
DOCUMENTS	Very general term. In the General Instructions it is suggested that the term document be avoided (the term "record" is preferred). In the National Archives Staff Information Circular No. 14 the term "document" is equated with "records" and "papers" as general terms to be used when no specific type of record can be discerned.
DRAFT	(1) A sketch = design (2) A financial record = voucher.

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
DRAWINGS	General term – P. R. Eldershaw appears not to use the term “drawing” at all, preferring elevations, plans, sections. All other lists appear to use the terms “plans” and “drawings” only.
ELEVATIONS	See “drawings”.
ENDORSEMENTS	Unlikely to be a separate record. Appears in the National Archives list but does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
ESTIMATES	Financial statement of predicted rather than actual receipts and expenditure.
EXCERPTS	Presumably the excerpts should be linked to the type of record from which the excerpts are made
EXHIBITS	Should the actual types of record exhibited be mentioned?
FIATS	= “authorisation”?
FILES	This term indicates physical form rather than administrative action. According to the National Archives Staff Information Circular “the use of the word ‘files’ should be avoided whenever possible”. The General Instructions suggest that “records” be used in preference to the term “files”. Nevertheless, the term “files” appears in at least two Australian finding aids.
FINDINGS	See “adjudications”.
FORM	Physical description only.
GARRISON ORDERS	
GENERAL ORDERS	
GOVERNMENT ORDERS	These three terms were included in the list compiled for the General Instructions – see “orders”.
GRANT	= “conveyance”.
GRAPHS	This term is in the National Archives list but strangely no Australian finding aids examined have any series of graphs – may these have been classed as “diagrams”?
HISTORIES	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
INDENT	Same as “indenture”? An “acquisition”?
INDENTURE	A form of deed.
INDEXES	All lists examined seem to have indexes; it is important to note that it is necessary for an index to index something (almost a sub-series of the series or part of the series). Mr. Michael Saclier has reminded me of a series description of which I had been aware previously. It reads “Partial index to an unidentified series, no date”.
INFORMATIONS	= A pleading
INQUIRIES	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
INQUISITIONS	A formal document recording the result of an inquiry. See also "adjudications".
INSTRUCTIONS	= "directives" and "orders" and "notices".
INTERPRETATIONS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
INVENTORIES	Detailed lists – note particularly Preliminary Inventories.
INVITATIONS	
JOURNALS	(1) = "diary" (2) Various financial journals need further descriptions – produce journal, cash sales journal, private journal, cash receipts journal, etc.
JUDGEMENTS	See "adjudications".
LANTERN SLIDES	(1) Physical form of photographic reproduction. = "conveyance" or "grant".
LEASE	Books in which individual accounts are kept.
LEDGERS	(see letters)
LETTER BOOKS	Always used with "inward" or "outward" – if both, then correspondence is used.
LETTERS	A document conferring a right to do something otherwise forbidden.
LICENCES	The most general word – others such as "inventory", "catalogue", "roll" have restricted or special meaning.
LISTS	Not a record type as it refers to the method of production of a print by lithographic process. Compare photostat, blueprint, etc.
LITHOGRAPH	(1) Ship's log (2) A daily record = "journal" or "diary".
LOG	(What is the plural – logs or claims?). List of claims especially that made by unions.
LOG OF CLAIM	List of cargo for use of Customs official. Compare bill of entry and bill of lading.
MANIFEST	One of the terms apparently used by and understood by everyone.
MAPS	Doubtful as a record type.
MEMBERSHIP CARDS	= "reminiscences".
MEMOIRS	= "note".
MEMORANDA	Proposal.
MEMORANDA OF AGREEMENT	Compare articles of association.
MEMORANDA OF ASSOCIATION	A memorial is a statement of facts particularly those drawn up for a petition.
MEMORIAL	This term is included in the National Archives and General Instructions lists but strangely does not appear to be used; instead we use cables, telegrams, etc., which classify messages according to method sent. (What are messages sent by carrier pigeon?)
MESSAGES	A specific type of licence.
MINER'S RIGHT	Commonly used but two distinct meanings: 1) = memoranda, 2) a summary of proceedings.
MINUTES	A deed dealing with land only.
MORTGAGES	= roll?
MUSTER	

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
NEGATIVES	Refers to the photographic form. There is a distinct similarity between the way photographic materials are treated with that of drawing materials.
NOMINATIONS	Doubtful as a record type but at least as good as publications.
NOTES	1) Brief record. 2) Short or informal letter. 3) Informal diplomatic communications.
NOTICES	1) = Instruction. 2) Intimation, intelligence, warning. (Therefore in some context notices could mean the same as instruction, or order or directive, while in another context it could be intimating intelligence or warning). There are also various legal notices.
NOTIFICATION	= 'Report' or 'announcement'.
OATHS	Used as in "Oath of Office" or "Oath of Allegiance" but is the oath the actual document?
OPERATING SHEET	This is one of several terms which I used as a record type – I now have no idea what I meant by it.
OPINIONS	A formal statement of professional advice.
ORDERS	= "Authorisation", "directive", "instruction".
PAPERS	One of the general terms which it is suggested by the National Archives Staff Information Circular can be used if series is composed of more than one single, specific type. The Australian General Instructions uses the term 'records' as preferable to 'papers'. The term appears to be more used to describe a collection of papers rather than of individual series, nevertheless it is used in some series descriptions.
PARDONS	What is the formal document granting a pardon?
PASSENGER LISTS	This term was included in the General Instructions but not noted in any of the finding aids. It is a specific list or roll.
PASSES	Specific type of licence.
PATENTS	A letter from sovereign, etc., conferring right title.
PAY ROLL	A list of wages or salaries. The term is in the National Archives list but does not appear in any Australian finding aids which I examined.
PETITIONS	1) A formal written supplication to parliament. 2) A formal written application to a court.
PHOTOGRAPHS	One of the number of terms for photographic materials – the most general.
PLAINTS	Not a document.
PLANS	The only specific form of architectural or engineering drawing in common use in finding aids. See 'drawings'.

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
PLEAS (PLEADINGS)	A formal statement by defence, but is there an actual document called a plea?
POSTERS	Curious dictionary definition – poster is a ‘placard displayed in public place’ – whereas placard is a ‘document printed on one side of single sheet for posting up’. Therefore, the records series should be ‘placard’ rather than ‘poster’! In any case I have not found one example of use of either ‘placard’ or ‘poster’, although ‘poster’ is in the National Archives list.
PRECEDENT	Doubtful as a record type.
PRECEPT	Equivalent (or nearly equivalent) to ‘writ’ or ‘warrant’.
PRECIS	See ‘abstract’ and ‘summary’.
PRINTS	Photographic term?
PROCEEDINGS	Doubtful as a record type.
PROCLAMATIONS	One of the terms added in the General Instructions , presumably to refer to government proclamations.
PROOF (OF BOOK)	Should be classified according to the record type of the final printed version.
PROOF (OF DEBT)	Doubtful as a record type.
PUBLICATIONS	Not a very meaningful record type, surely the record type of the Publication could be determined.
QUESTIONNAIRES	More likely ‘replies to questionnaires’ – ‘questionnaires’ indicates to me a series of forms of questions.
RECEIPTS	A receipt is one form of voucher.
RECORD	See comments on ‘documents’ – ‘files’.
RECORDERS	?
REGISTERS	As with indexes – has to register something.
REGULATIONS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined. = ‘memoir’.
REMINISCENCES	See ‘questionnaire’.
REPLIES	Another common type.
REPORTS	One of the terms in the National Archives list which does not appear in any Australian finding aid which I examined.
REQUESTS	See also ‘indent’.
REQUISITIONS	Formal expression of opinion by legislative body or meeting, etc.
RESOLUTIONS	A formal report (with statistics, etc.) compiled by order.
RETURNS	A physical form of document; also official list.
ROLLS	A list showing turns for duty, etc.
ROSTER	1) Order made by judge or court; compare ‘adjudications’. 2) Regulations by a corporate body to govern its affairs, compare ‘articles of association’.
RULES	?
SCALE	A tabulated statement. Similar to ‘inventory’ and ‘list’.
SCHEDULES	

RECORD TYPE TERM	COMMENTS
SCRIPTS	= 'Speech' or 'address'?
SEALS	Doubtful as a record type, presumably refers to a sealed document.
SEARCH	Doubtful as a record type.
SECRET LETTER	Included in General Instructions list but not appropriate as a separate record type.
SECTION	Specific type of drawing – see 'drawings'.
SERMON	Specific type of address or speech.
SKETCHES	A preliminary drawing or painting etc. Perhaps 'sketch' should be considered a sub-class of the appropriate record type of finished article.
SLIPS	As in "Deposit Slip" or "Paying In Slip" – really a voucher.
STATEMENTS	A formal account of facts. See also "accounts".
STATISTICS	Numerical facts systematically collected. (And as far as the records are concerned presumably "systematically stated").
SUBMISSION	A term added to the General Instructions list but doubtful as a record type.
SUMMARIES	= 'abstract' 'precis', etc.
SUMMONSES	A legal invitation.
SURRENDER	'Deed of surrender'?
SURVEYS	An account given as a result of a survey. Strangely this term does not appear to have been used in any Australian finding aid examined.
TABLES	= 'statistics' if numerical facts are stated. But what is the record type if it is a list of facts?
TABULATIONS	Why 'tabulations' and 'tables'?
TELEGRAMS	Message sent by telegraph.
TENDER	Offer to do a thing at a certain price.
TRACING	Relate to the method of making a copy.
TRANSCRIPTS	Actually a written copy but usually has more specific meaning as record of court proceedings or meeting.
UNDERTAKINGS	?
VALUATIONS	= 'estimate'.
VOUCHERS	A document supporting entries in a journal or ledger (includes receipt, deposit slip, etc.).
WARRANTS	1) An authorisation. 2) A voucher. 3) = 'commission'.
WILL	= directives in legal form for deposition to be made of a person's property.
WRITS	Form of written commands.