

THE LAMB REPORT AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

by Michael Saclier*

In what follows I shall have a number of possibly unpalatable things to say about the Australian Archives. I wish to make clear at the outset that, in a situation in which sides seem to have been drawn and combativeness rather than constructiveness seems to be the keyword, I am on the side of the Archives. The institution has for years had a bad reputation as a place to do research, as a place of employment and as an organization to do business with. I believe, perhaps naively but still firmly, that most of this has come about because of the organizational situation which has existed since the Commonwealth Archives Office achieved its divorce from the National Library. Archives do not rate highly in the order of priorities or scale of importance of governments, public service boards or the general public, as has been made all too clear in Australia both at the State and National levels. Starved of funds, depressed in classification and with a function neither understood nor recognized by those in political and public service authority the Archives Office has existed in an essentially untenable position for many years.

There may well be some internal difficulties (as there usually are in any organization) which have exacerbated the situation and these will need to be resolved. But basically the present situation exists because of an unsatisfactory — indeed non-viable — public service situation and a long term government policy of neglect except for isolated decisions such as those giving rise to the access policy wrangle which, when made, were to say the least unfortunate in their effects. These are things which can and must be remedied if Australia is to have a National Archives of the stature it so badly needs.

Since the Lamb Report was tabled in Parliament on 7 March, there has naturally been a good deal of discussion on certain sections of it and of the intentions of Government in relation to the Australian Archives. Much of what has been said and written has been special pleading by interested parties and all (or nearly all) has been based on inadequate information since, apart from the brief general statement by the Minister in the House when tabling the report, there has been no public indication of the Government's intentions although some individuals seem to have had access to some form of policy document.

A submission has been made to and approved by Cabinet and Caucus and it is rumoured that a draft Bill is in existence. Yet the substance of these documents has not been made public. Consequently public discussion of the Report and its future effects must be confined to the text of the Report, certain isolated facts and known administrative contexts.

Mr Burmester has very adequately reviewed the Lamb Report and I find myself in substantial agreement with him on most points. I propose therefore to take four sections from the Report and relate these to the context into which the Report has been injected.

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I

In section I of his Report¹ Dr Lamb canvassed some of the arguments for and against a statutory corporation and the alternative departmental arrangement. The only argument he gives in favour of the authority is the view "that public records are the property of the people . . . and that the Archives should be one step removed from civil service and political control and from restrictions that might result from it".

He then goes on to point out the close relationship necessary between the Archives and Government departments and agencies if its proper functions are to be adequately performed and "For these reasons I feel that the position most advantageous for it will be within the normal departmental structure".² This is a polite way of saying that the departments won't have a bar of the idea of a statutory authority.

Before going on I should now say that my immediate reaction is disagreement with Dr Lamb on this point. The "property of the people" argument he advances in favour of the authority is only one of the arguments available, and certainly not the most reliable. Other and equally important arguments are that a statutory body provides an opportunity for the institution to voice publicly its needs, aspirations and frustrations through its published annual report;³ it provides an accessible link between the archives user and both the archives management and government; and it can act as both a point of appeal for the user and a protection for the archivist.

It should be pointed out that in Australia the statutory body works well in New South Wales and has been accepted in Victoria and overseas something similar is to be found in France, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland and Yugoslavia,⁴ so unless the agencies of the Australian Government are strangely unique, there seems no objective reason why departmental needs should not be satisfactorily served in the national Australian setting by a statutory body.

Admittedly, however, the statutory corporation is not the only answer. The National Archives of the United States, Canada, Britain, East and West Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and Denmark (amongst others) function without such a body. The argument used by Dr Lamb is persuasive for unless the records are forthcoming from the departments one cannot have a national archives and, if the departments are immovably against an authority from the beginning there is no point in trying. I would, however, be interested to know on what basis this conclusion was reached. What are the departmental objections? And, indeed, in what form was the proposition put to them? Part of the information needed is the rationale of the departmental objections to this alternative.

But when all is said and done the question is fairly academic. For unless the Act strikes an acceptable balance between departmental demands on the one hand and the needs and "rights" of users,⁵ neither organizational scheme will work to give us the national archives we should have.

There is, however, another disquieting aspect to this matter. Lamb favours “the normal departmental structure” and says that this opinion “is based on 20 years of experience in Canada”.⁶ He goes on to recommend the appointment (“as a safeguard”) of an Advisory Council⁷ with a composition heavily weighted on the user side (presumably as a sop to the academic pressure group) as compared to the Canadian model⁸ which has a majority of departmental representatives.

Curiosity impelled me, therefore, to look at the Canadian legislation to discover what Lamb might mean by “normal departmental structure”. A reference to the Canadian Act⁹ shows that the Dominion Archivist has the “rank and salary” of a deputy head of a department and controls the Archives “under the direction of the Minister”. Further reference to the *Public Service Employment Act* 1966-7¹⁰ confirms that the Head of a Canadian department is the Minister and the Deputy Head is equivalent to the Secretary of an Australian department. In Britain also and many other countries besides Canada the Archivist or Keeper is responsible to the Minister.

This is apparently not to be the case in Australia for the position of Director-General has been graded as second division, level 4 — equivalent to Deputy Secretary rank. In other words it appears that the Australian Archives is to continue as it has been for years, a *division* of a department. Upgraded, certainly, but still only a division. I fail to see how such an arrangement will be an improvement on the present set up, particularly since many of the Archives problems flow from that arrangement.

Certain implications flow from this in relation to Dr Lamb’s recommendations. For example, the Archives (in the Lamb scheme) is to publish an annual report and in this are to be printed the (presumably sometimes critical) comments and reports made by the Advisory Council. Yet in Australian terms the idea of a division of a department publishing an annual report is unthinkable. So much for Dr Lamb’s safeguard.

Again, the budget for the Australian Archives will presumably continue to be part of the general budget of the Department of the Special Minister of State and will therefore be framed initially by the Secretary in relation to the competing needs of other divisions of the Department. This should be compared to the National Library budget prepared by the Director General, approved by Council and submitted direct to the Minister for consideration in relation to other competing departments.

In his statement of 7 March, the Minister said:

The aim of all these measures is to create an Australian Archives of a level comparable to that now provided by the National Library of Australia in its own field.

On the face of it the Australian Archives will be a very pale reflection in terms of autonomy, public service status and public stature, of the National Library which it will someday face across the waters of Lake Burley Griffin.

All of which brings me back to my earlier point that we are discussing the question with inadequate information because the Government’s intentions are not known. It may be that the doubts and fears which I share with many others are unfounded, but until the Govern-

ment makes clear its intentions in detail we cannot know that our disquiet is unwarranted.

The Government earned itself an enormous amount of goodwill by inviting Dr Lamb to Australia, by holding the Seminar on 1 September, 1973 and by undertaking to provide a new deal for the nation's archives. It would be a great pity, to my mind, if that goodwill were to be dissipated and wasted by reverting to the old governmental mode of contemptuous secrecy and presenting academics, archivists and the institutions which should be cooperating with the Archives—universities, colleges, archives and libraries—with the *fait accompli* of a Bill before Parliament.

Instead the Government should publish a Green Paper explaining in detail what it proposes to do and why—particularly in areas where the Lamb Report is to be departed from—and it should invite persons and institutions with a legitimate interest in the outcome to present submissions. The proposed Task Force might well be used as the focus for these representations to collate them and present a report to Government on the reaction to the proposals and the Task Force's views on the validity of criticisms and proposals. By doing so the Government would maintain that goodwill (which still exists) and give the groups already mentioned and indeed the interested general public, a voice in the final formulation of the national Archives legislation.

II

The next point I wish to take is Dr Lamb's section on the public image and attitudes of the Archives.

National Archives staff should be prominent in (the Association of Archivists soon to be formed). The Archives Office will receive much more attention and support if its staff is active and known outside its walls . . .¹¹ A change in what can only be described as attitude is very necessary . . . The Archives Office has been criticised so freely that, not surprisingly it tends to be on the defensive. Rightly or wrongly it is regarded as being rather unfriendly; the researcher . . . frequently feels unwelcome . . . The Archives Office should endeavour to be more "user-minded".¹²

What Dr Lamb is describing are the symptoms of a kind of corporate paranoia which, like the individual disease, tends to be self-sustaining and self-reinforcing. The belief that research workers and institutions are hostile produces a withdrawal reaction, an unwillingness to maintain contact and to communicate which, naturally makes cooperation impossible. This is seen variously by users and institutions as aloofness, arrogance or simple bloody-mindedness and they react accordingly with exasperation and sometimes with hostility and so the cycle goes merrily on. As a relatively minor example of an extramural case which excited much acid comment at the time we could take the seminar on the *Guide to Collections; Manuscripts relating to Australia* held in March 1972 to which the Archives sent an *observer!* Or one could instance the attempts in recent months to get the Archives involved in discussions on the proposal for a Diploma of Archives Administration course at the Canberra College of Advanced Education.

A similar sequence of cause and effect operates in the vexatious area of access policy. The Archives, encumbered with an embarrassing

set of Cabinet instructions which it must apply but cannot disclose or explain, reacts with what appears to the user as, at best, pettifogging bureaucracy at work and at worst deliberate obstructionism. In fact, of course, it is the staff of an undermanned institution trying to do a difficult job with insufficient resources and unable to explain the situation (a) because the instructions under which they are working are themselves restricted, (b) because any explanation would be tantamount to criticism of the Department and Cabinet and is therefore forbidden and (c) because the syndrome in any case makes explanation almost impossible.

An example of how difficult it is to break this cycle of cause and effect came to light in the form of *Notes on Developments in the Australian Archives* issued over the Director's signature on 5 May, which is reprinted in *Archives & Manuscripts*, Vol. 5, No. 7 May 1974, p. 187. It should be said that this is an excellent sign, being the first thing of its kind to issue from the Archives in many years and hopefully is the forerunner of a periodical bulletin as recommended by Dr Lamb (p. 30). Yet the brand of the C.A.O. Syndrome is clearly visible, particularly in the section headed *Access clearance position*.

This was an opportunity to gain a great deal of user goodwill by saying in effect "The situation was dreadful and from the point of view of some users it still is. But it is getting a little better and we are working hard under difficult conditions to improve it. Until we are allowed to put Dr Lamb's recommendations into effect please bear with us". Instead the guarded, even stilted, prose, obviously the product of determined efforts to avoid making any "damaging" admissions or commitments has all the warm spontaneity of an undertaker's handshake.

But it is a start and the important point is that to break the cycle the initiative must come from the Archives. To some of those within the organization this may seem an unfair thing to say but it is nevertheless true. For the Archives is and will continue to be the centre of the storm and it is only from the centre that the initiatives can come if there is to be a change in its relationships with users, academics and institutions. In this case only unilateral disarmament will work.

III

As devotees of the comic strip *Miss Peach* will recall Ira produced one of his many devastating insights into the human condition when he remarked to the school psychiatrist "Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean they're *not* out to get me". This could well be the motto for the Archives at the moment for there is no doubt that it is surrounded by hostility and even enemies, individual and institutional, and the reaction to Dr Lamb's recommendation on the subject of collecting private papers provides a good example of the kind of special pleadings, innuendo, rumour mongering and plain bloody-mindedness which will be brought to bear when personal privileges or institutional empires are being threatened with some diminution.

Dr Lamb devotes Section 6 of his Report¹³ to the question of whether the Archives should be permitted to collect non-Government records. He argues cogently that, particularly in the cases of major

political figures, the archives should be allowed to collect “private papers”.

“While in office” he writes:

a Prime Minister, to cite the extreme example really has few papers than can properly be classed as private; almost his every act may have political interest and significance. His papers (and those of his cabinet colleagues) usually include many official documents and even complete official dockets that relate to matters that have been of such special concern that he has included them in his personal files. This is widely recognised and so is the advantage of having such papers included in the National Archives.¹⁴

Dr Lamb does not spell out the reasons for his recommendation on the same page that not only should the Archives have the power to collect “private political papers” but “any other appropriate private papers that donors may wish to place in it”. The reasons, however, are clear enough to minds not closed by other considerations.

To begin with, the idea of separating the papers accumulated by a minister while in office from those accumulated before he entered politics or before he came to power, is so utterly ridiculous that it should not need comment. Again there are other classes of people whose private papers might fit very well in the Australian Archives — some senior career public servants for instance and those other, less “standard” public servants recruited at a high level and involved in many different tasks during their careers.

Finally there is a basic question of whether a library is a fitter place for the deposit of non-literary manuscripts than an archives. In Australia there is a tendency to assume it is, simply because in the two largest States and the Commonwealth the libraries were set up before the archives and because the separation of private from Government records was an established fact of life at the time of settlement unlike older countries where the distinction appears only very late in their history.

It is, however, quite possible to argue (and to document in detail if such documentation were necessary) not only that libraries are unfit places for government records but, because the same pernicious practices which make them so have also been applied to private papers which partake of the nature of archives — and may even be identifiable as such in terms of arigorous definition — that libraries are unfit places for non-literary manuscripts also.

But the most important aspect of this proposal (which is after all only a very minor side issue of the Lamb Report) is the nature of the arguments used against it. The two groups currently expressing opposition to the Archives being given power to collect private papers are the academics and the librarians (in which group, it may seem faintly obscene of me to add, I include some archivists).

The academic arguments range from the reasoned if (in my view) mistaken to the wildly selfish. Of the former I think the best exponent is Professor L. F. Crisp of the Political Science Department, School of General Studies, A.N.U., who sets out his views in a letter to the editor published in the *Canberra Times* of 1 May.¹⁵

He begins by referring to the reported proposal that the Archives become the normal and perhaps even the principal collector and repository for private papers of leading Australians

and goes on to express the hope that

the projected Archives legislation will be shorn of any provisions making it a major repository of collections of private papers or giving it power to take over or initiate negotiations for taking over National Library holdings of papers or documents.

Here again it should be noted is another case where rumour seems to have run rife for neither the statement by the Minister on 7 March nor the Lamb Report give any hint of support for the first statement and Lamb specifically states that “Nothing in the nature of a wholesale transfer of (the National Library’s) manuscript collections to the National Archives would be either fair or justified”. The sooner, therefore, that a statement of the Government’s intentions is published, the sooner such rumours will be scotched. Until then they will continue to prosper and multiply.

Professor Crisp goes on to explain his three reasons for hoping that the Act “will be shorn of any provisions” etc. These are

- (1) that because the Archives is to be within the departmental framework “it could in the practical day-to-day working of the place mean that the priorities and interests of research scholars could take second place”;
- (2) that when working on private papers a scholar wants “simultaneously available on the spot” contemporary newspapers and periodicals reference works and “the general corpus of secondary sources” which are in the library; and
- (3) that “the Archives have an enormous amount of catching up to do in other directions and should not be called on to divert thought and resources to empire-building in the private papers field”.

These are in my opinion very light-weight reasons indeed compared with those which Lamb advances. The first is of course, if valid, not so much an argument against the Archives keeping private papers, as a reason for taking the Archives out of the departmental framework. For its major preoccupation must continue to be the official records of the Australian Government and, if the needs of scholars are really to take second place then the ones who will suffer most will be those using a preponderance of public records.

Seen in another — and more basic — way this argument represents a deep dissatisfaction with the past performance of the Archives in its service to scholarship under the existing departmental regime and an equally profound distrust in the likelihood of any improvement in that regard given the absence of any apparent intention to alter the nature of that regime in any material way.

The second reason given is one which is not supported by all scholars, many of whom recognize that simultaneous reference to printed and documentary materials is, in all but a tiny proportion of cases, a myth.¹⁶ Observation in reading rooms where Professor Crisp’s criteria obtain (e.g. the Mitchell Library) shows that people simply do not dash from manuscript to reference work and back again as a normal research technique. Indeed all such a procedure does is to destroy concentration. The most efficient workers (amongst whom I am certain Professor Crisp is to be numbered) in fact use one type of material only in any given working session, saving for a future session queries raised by the manuscripts which must be answered from reference works or secondary sources. It is of small consequence

therefore whether the next session is in the same or the next room or a mile away in another institution.

In this argument, incidentally, Professor Crisp is somewhat misleading in referring to the use of “contemporary newspapers” in conjunction with manuscripts. Few, if any, manuscript libraries — certainly not the Mitchell and the National — issue newspapers in the same room as manuscripts.

Professor Crisp’s third argument, although he qualifies it as being “perhaps only a middle term consideration”, is perhaps the weakest of all. What grounds on the publicly available evidence (the Lamb Report) are there for assuming that (impliedly scarce) resources will be diverted from the primary task of “catching up” in the public records field to the detriment of that task? And why use the emotive and pejorative “empire-building”? If there has been any actual or attempted “empire-building in the private-papers field” in the past or projected for the future, it has been on the part of that National Library which Professor Crisp admires.

In fact the most telling argument in favour of authorising the Archives to collect private papers is that, empire building or not, $(n + 1)$ institutions will attract more records from a given population than n institutions. In part this will result from more people being available for the task of seeking them out. But, in the main it will be attributable to that axiom of the commercial world exemplified in our supermarkets, that 20 brands of cigarettes or detergents will sell more than 10 brands. This phenomenon is the result of the operation of free choice with merchandising techniques which assiduously ignore the fact that there is little difference in the nature or quality of the product.

Professor Crisp’s letter contains one more passage which I shall return to later. For the moment, however, I shall leave that document to deal with other less temperate critics of Dr Lamb’s recommendation.

The less responsible academic line on this point can be dealt with more briefly and should be left mercifully anonymous. When the unsupported assertions and dark hints are stripped away it amounts to a fear that the senior academic involved will not, in the Archives, be treated with that awed reverence to which he has become accustomed in the National Library. Such protagonists deserve to be ignored but unfortunately the small number involved are both vocal and eminent and are likely to be listened to because of their eminence without regard to the validity of their arguments.

The library antagonists are also vocal, though not in print. One of the more serious arguments put to me by a senior librarian of the National Library runs that Treasury will not finance two institutions to do the same work and that if the Archives legislation gives to the Australian Archives the power to collect non-public records, the National Library, which collects them under the grandly vague and all embracing terms of S.6 (a) of the *National Library Act* 1960 will be forbidden to do so.

If this is to be the case then it is another matter which the Government should make explicit. Certainly it should not happen and for exactly the same reason that the Archives should be authorised to

collect private papers — that the two are likely to collect more than the one alone.

If logic governs the Treasury however it should not occur and for three reasons. First, the National Library is not at present the only nationally funded institution collecting private papers. The Australian National University (represented by my unit) and the Australian War Memorial do so and are directly financed by the Australian Government and have been for many years. So, indeed, since the Australian Government took over total responsibility for tertiary funding, are the Melbourne University Archives, the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney, the Fryer Library of the University of Queensland, Wollongong University College and Flinders University of South Australia (which eccentrically, has the Evatt Papers) and no doubt there are others.

Second, on a narrower focus the National Library has plans, I understand, to enter the business archives field yet there are, as I have already pointed out, already two federally funded institutions, engaged in this field (as there have been for many years) and a third (the Wollongong University College) has recently entered the lists.¹⁷ What, pray, is the difference?

Finally, the National Library and the infant National Gallery are already parties to a market sharing agreement in regard to the collection of paintings. Why then, if Treasury gets stroppy, shouldn't a similar agreement be negotiated between the Archives and the Library? Why indeed shouldn't such a division of collecting fields be written into the two Acts or into the Archives Act alone?

Another of the common library-originated arguments is the one which Lamb expressed as follows

Fear (real but surely unfounded) is sometimes expressed that a government might welcome the deposit of private political papers in the Archives and even encourage it with a view to controlling and restricting access to them.¹⁸

The proponents of this line conveniently forget Lamb's answer to this:

Any such suspicion can be countered by making it clear that the only restrictions on access will be those stipulated by the donor, and the National Archives Act must give the Archives authority to accept such conditions and make them legally binding.¹⁹

This is unfortunate because Lamb's proviso is important. This fear *is* expressed and it is of the utmost importance that it should be laid at rest as Lamb suggests.

Unfortunately, however, the opponents of the idea are coming very close to advocating the opposite. Professor Crisp's letter already dealt with has the following as its penultimate paragraph:

No one would suggest, of course, that, if someone for reasons which seem good to him or her willed their papers to the Archives rather than to the Library, the donor's wishes should be disregarded.

And again, during the discussion following the delivery of this paper, a speaker from the National Library suggested that all mention of private papers should be omitted from the Act. Yet I am certain that Professor Crisp and that librarian would be amongst the first to notice and comment unfavourably upon the first hint of restriction of access on the part of the Archives — even if it were caused by a laudable concentration on the primary public records task leading to delays in

processing private papers. Yet if their advice were followed instead of Dr Lamb's they could not logically object if political suppression took place.

I shall draw a merciful veil of brevity again over the wilder utterances of the librarians. The senior librarian at the National Library for example who assured me that no matter what the Act said *a la* Lamb, if the Minister demanded suppression of private papers they would be suppressed. Or the statement during the discussion period already mentioned that the Government has no more right to confiscate a man's papers than to confiscate his house or car. The author of the latter gem did at least have the grace to blush when it was pointed out that confiscation had never been suggested by anyone until that moment.

What the argument is really about of course is the fear of some librarians and (I am sorry to say) archivists that, if the Archives enters the private papers field they will be facing competition, that they may actually have to get out and do some fieldwork rather than depending on institutional prestige to bring the papers in. The National Library and the Library of N.S.W. have paid lip service to the ideal of obviating competition and ensuring a rational collection policy but in view of past events and future projections one is entitled to be a little cynical about it. The situation has, in the view of many, not changed very much in the seventeen years since a now distinguished academic wrote that "the agreement is generally known to be an attempt not to share with all libraries but to demarcate the White and Metcalfe Empires".²⁰

Opposition to the Lamb recommendation was recently (and honestly) expressed by a State Archivist who wrote:

I am not particularly happy about the Australian Archives collecting private papers, but only because this will increase competition between collecting agencies and confusion in the public mind.²¹

My own view, as I have already indicated, is that increased "competition" in the sense of an addition of one major institution is in no way a threat except perhaps to the complacency of the National Library. It will be apparent on a moment's reflection that it will not threaten the collecting areas of the libraries and archives of the smaller States to any appreciable extent since their interests are quite different to those which Lamb suggests as being proper for the National Archives. It will, in my view, lead to considerable benefits for scholars in the long term.

As for increasing "confusion in the public mind" I cannot see it, except for minds already confused. I trust that when the daughter of the South Australian or Tasmanian Minister for Lands 1910-13 offers her father's journals to the Australian Archives she would be told (gently and kindly but firmly) that the proper place for them is in the South Australian State Archives or the Archives Office of Tasmania as the case might be.

Finally, I have yet to be convinced that it would be wrong for the Archives to be given power to collect non-government records yet right for the United States Archives, the Dominion Archives of Canada, the British Public Record Office and County Record Offices, not to mention the Australian War Memorial and the Tasmanian, South

Australian, West Australian and (nominally at least) the Queensland State Archives to do so. Each of the arguments levelled against the Lamb recommendation could be directed against all or nearly all of these institutions, and could be shown to be just as hollow as they are in relation to the Australian Archives.

Before leaving Section 6 of the Lamb Report it would be as well to deal with its last paragraph which recommends that the Joint Copying Project should be taken over by the Archives from the National Library.²² The reason given — that “These are copies of official records that for the most part relate directly to Australia and to my mind fall within the purview of the Archives” — is a little hard to accept given the great bulk of pre-Federation records covered in the P.R.O. series and the fact that the miscellaneous series consists of private records. The added complication of the project being a joint undertaking between the National Library and the Library of N.S.W. is completely ignored by Dr Lamb. This has led to a fairly general rejection of the idea of a transfer and an assumption that the recommendation was an aberration on Dr Lamb’s part brought about by a failure to grasp the full scope and nature of the project and its administrative background.

It is interesting to speculate, however, on whether there might have been other reasons for Dr Lamb’s recommendation which he did not set down. Certainly there has been considerable criticism over the years of the way in which the filming has been done and of the non-existent finding-aids, both of which make the P.R.O. films very hard to use. Nothing can now be done of course about the first problem but it could well be that some frustrated users may have convinced Dr Lamb that the second was more likely to be set right by the Archives than by the National Library given the extraordinary dilatoriness of the latter institution in producing the *Handbook*. We shall probably never know.

One hopes, for everybody’s sake, that this particular minor part of a minor section is quietly forgotten about — for the sake of the Archives trying to produce finding aids from the films, for the sake of the Library which will feel wronged and for the sake of the rest of us who will have to listen to the screams of outrage.

IV

The last section of Dr Lamb’s report which I want to comment on is that dealing with the training of staff.²³ Dr Lamb seems to concentrate most attention upon in-service training on the grounds that “broadly speaking, the only way to acquire competence in archives work is by experience on the job”.²⁴ He goes on that the difficulty with in-service training is that it leaves the archivist without a paper qualification to show that he or she is a qualified professional archivist — “something that a young university graduate who joins the staff is naturally anxious to secure”.²⁵ After mentioning several other points Dr Lamb writes “In some respects a relatively short course, in combination with in-service training, could well be the most satisfactory plan”.²⁶

Now there would be few who would quibble with Dr Lamb’s first point, experience is certainly the only path to competence, but I wish

to suggest that the remainder of this section is suspect, not so much for what it recommends as the reasoning behind it. The advantages of formal training are not solely the end result of a paper qualification for the successful candidates. There are in fact two very important advantages which Dr Lamb does not mention and one of them is of particular importance in the case of the Australian Archives.

In the first place the formal training course is a far more efficient means of imparting the theoretical framework and the fund of general and comparative knowledge which the archivist needs than any in-service training programme can be. Dr Lamb hints at recognition of this fact when he observes that "it is rarely possible to provide sufficient time for background reading and for instruction in the theoretical aspects of archives work."²⁷ The unstated corollary of this of course is that if there is insufficient time to impart the theory it will be pushed into the background by the practical, internal institutional matters which must take precedence in in-service training.

Looked at from a slightly different angle formal training must be seen as more efficient in producing competent archivists because the new diplomate comes to his job already equipped with the theoretical and other knowledge which his colleague undergoing in-service training must painfully acquire during the course, or more probably, given the usual inefficiencies of such programmes, however good, during the first year or eighteen months of his employment.

The second advantage of formal training is negative yet nonetheless important. An inevitable feature of in-service training is that it is institution centred. Indeed the most important aspect of any in-service training programme is, and should be, "how we do it here". But this admirable and necessary strand can be dangerous if it spreads beyond its proper area or, because of necessary priorities, overshadows theoretical and comparative considerations with the result that "the way it's done here" becomes in the mind of the trainee "the only way to do it".

As has already been observed in Section II above one of the great and pressing needs for the Australian Archives is to become more outward looking. One certain way of preventing this is by concentrating on in-service training to the exclusion of the broad and balanced view which should be the characteristic of any post-graduate archives course and the trainees it turns out.

I am not certain that I can provide a satisfactory answer to Dr. Lamb's contention that in-service training

is the only way the considerable number of new archivists that must be added to the professional staff of the National Archives in the near future can be made competent employees within a relatively short time.²⁸

It seems to me there is a fundamental conflict between the crash programme Dr Lamb envisages and the need to produce well *educated* archivists as opposed to well *trained* institutional officers. I am certain, however, that the co-operation of the Archives with the Canberra College of Advanced Education and the University of N.S.W. and its active and creative support of their existing and projected courses together with in-service training will go a long way towards finding a solution to both the short-term and long-term needs of the Archives.

In conclusion there are a couple of points which should be made in a paper such as this. The first is so basic that it should not need saying, but unfortunately it does. The academic community naturally enough wants access to records in their totality. Closed records are at best tantalising and at worst inhibit research.

Dr Lamb in his Report dealt with this point when he wrote:²⁹

Unfortunately free public access to the totality of Commonwealth records is not practicable; like other governments, the Government of Australia has found it necessary to withhold certain categories of papers—some on security grounds, others because they contain information supplied in confidence, or information about individuals the disclosure of which would cause distress or embarrassment to living persons, and so on.

Unfortunately, I feel, Dr Lamb has not reached the heart of this matter, which is that access to government records is not an inherent right of the citizen.

The view “that public records are the property of the people, not of civil servants nor of whatever administration happens to be in power” (which has already been quoted in Section I above) on which the more sweeping claims for open access are based, as well as the demand for an independent statutory authority, is simply inapplicable in Australia. The second part is true enough—records are not the property of public servants or ministers—but they are not “the property of the people” either. They are the property of that grand (if abstract) concept “The Crown”. And access must needs be permitted or refused by the human embodiment of the Crown—that is by governments which formulate policies and public servants who execute them—or by Parliament in the form of legislation permitting or forbidding access to them.

The availability of public records for academic study as a normal feature of life is a relatively recent phenomenon in the world's history. Archives have been maintained for centuries but for the purposes of the State not, until recently, for scholarship. Even though archival institutions are today justified and supported on cultural grounds and archives may be regarded as grist for the information science mill the absolute rights of the State over its own records, to keep or destroy them, to permit or forbid access to them, is paramount. It is important to realise, therefore, not only that “free public access to the totality of Commonwealth records is impracticable” (for the reasons Dr Lamb gives) but that restrictions on access are not restrictions on a *right* but restrictions on a *privilege*. Only a revolutionary change in our accepted philosophy of the State can alter that and I see no signs of it.

It is about time that the academic community recognized these facts and stopped behaving as though they lived in a utopian republic which had somehow gone astray. They might then expend their energy and influence more profitably in persuading governments to be reasonable, consistent and open in their attitudes than in heaping abuse on institutions like the Archives.

The second point is my one general criticism of the Lamb Report, that in certain instances it is ambiguous and weaker in its recommendations, than it should have been. Section 10 (“*A National System of Archives*”)³⁰ is one such case. Dr Lamb mentions several possible projects or areas of concern in which the Archives might be involved but does not seize the opportunity which was there to make

proposals for integration, co-operation and standardisation amongst Australia's dozen or more archival institutions. He might for instance have proposed the creation of a body along the lines of the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services, to initiate and foster the kinds of projects he proposes and to promote co-operation and the exchange of information between institutions. Given the isolationism of Australian archives in the past such a recommendation might have done a lot of good.

Again, on the subject of *The Position of Director-General* (Section II)³¹ the Report tends toward ambiguity to put it mildly. On Section 10 Dr Lamb may justifiably have felt that his time in Australia was too short to do justice to such a complex issue but surely the top position in the Australian Archives itself might have drawn an unequivocal recommendation. Instead: the position "should not be closed to an archivist . . . The National Archives will certainly benefit greatly if it is headed by a professionally qualified Director-General who has had substantial research experience".³²

This criticism is not, of course, to be applied to every section of the Report. Sections 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 (*Functions of the Archives, Archives Participation in Records Management, Buildings, Access to Public Records over 30 years old* and *Access to Recent Records* respectively) are as positive as one could wish for. But these are also the sections about which there could be little argument anyway — any Australian archivist could have told the Government that.

Unfortunately, however, the two sections mentioned have caused some souring of attitude towards the whole Report. Section II particularly (in conjunction with the terms of the advertisement for the position of Director-General) has been the subject of a good deal of cynical comment in some quarters, the impression having been gained that the Government has no intention of appointing an archivist to the position, that Dr Lamb knew this and that his ambiguity was an attempt to put the best possible face on the matter.

The question might also be raised as to whether similar pre-emptions existed in other areas of the Report, particularly Section I, although the case is slightly different there. It would seem clear from Dr Lamb's words that he would in any case have recommended the departmental alternative, based on his Canadian experience. But was the flimsy and simplistic argument for the statutory body, so easily brushed aside, dictated in part by the knowledge of what the Government wanted to do?

Suspicious such as these may never be answered with certainty, certainly not until the records are released and perhaps not even then. It is to be hoped that the Government will allay them by becoming a little more open in its dealings on the whole subject, along the lines suggested in this paper.

The Lamb Report is a milestone and an important one in the history of Australian archives generally, not only the Australian archives. Whether it remains a mute signpost on a deserted road or a vital guide now depends on other people and their actions.

Notes and References

1. W. Kaye Lamb, *Development of the National Archives; Report September, 1973*, A.G.P.S. Canberra, 1974 (hereafter referred to as the "Lamb Report"). Section 1, pp. 4-6.
2. *Ibid*, p. 4.
3. See for example the *Annual Reports of the Archives Authority of N.S.W.*
4. For overseas legislation see *Archivum* vols. XVII (1967), XIX (1969), XX (1970), XXI (1971).
5. For a case which may have implications in any consideration of the concept of the "right to know", see *Attorney-General for N.S.W. v. Butterworth and Co. Ltd.* 1938, 38 S.R. (N.S.W.) 196, 55 W.N. 49 and particularly the British cases cited therein on common law limitations to an individual's right of access to public records.
6. Lamb Report, p. 5.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Public Records Order 9 September 1966*, *Archivum*, vol. XXI (1971), p. 50.
9. Public Archives Act, 1952, chap. 222 S. 3 French text: *Archivum* vol. XXI (1971) p. 47; English text: *The Revised Statutes of Canada 1952*, Ottawa, 1953, vol. IV, p. 4455.
10. 14-15-16 Elizabeth II, c. 71, S. 2 *Statutes of Canada 1966-7*, pp. 687-709.
11. Lamb Report, p. 34.
12. *Ibid*, p. 32.
13. *Ibid*, pp. 18-21.
14. *Ibid*, p. 20.
15. Page 23.
16. The exception is the case of comparing a published text with the original.
17. Let me emphasise by the way that this is not a complaint. The field is big enough to accommodate a number of collecting institutions provided they have enough sense not to trip each other up at every turn.
18. Lamb Report, p. 20.
19. *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.
20. Memorandum in files of Archives, R.S.S.S., March, 1957.
21. Letter dated 4 May, 1974, to Secretary, Archives Section, L.A.A., copy passed to me by the writer.
22. Lamb Report, p. 21.
23. *Ibid*, Section 9, pp. 16-18.
24. *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.
25. *Ibid*, p. 17.
26. *Ibid*.
27. *Ibid*.
28. *Ibid*, p. 18.
29. *Ibid*, p. 23.
30. *Ibid*, pp. 28-31.
31. *Ibid*, p. 32.
32. *Ibid*.