ARCHIVAL TRAINING IN LONDON
Some Experiences 1972-73

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Archival training in Australia is no longer "at the drawing board", to use the expression adopted in these columns three years ago by Mr Michael Piggott.[1] Like that sister problem—professional organization—it has ceased to be a matter for lament or speculation, and become one of organization and dissemination.

When in 1971 I decided to seek professional archival training, it was however rather a drawing board matter. After three years working in the Victorian State Archives, I had become convinced of the need for such training. The want of rationality in the office's procedures was not only something which annoyed the public—who occasionally vented their spleen in letters to the editor of *The Age*—it was also something which annoyed the staff. I was convinced that this want of rationality could be cured, at least in part, by the adoption of tested, "professional" practices: professional training appeared the obvious means of access to these practices.

At the same time, sharing in a pre-separation climate of archival enthusiasm and paranoia towards librarians generated by the processes which eventually led to partition, I thought that professional training should be sought in a pure school of archival instruction, free from irrelevance and slanted towards records management, computers, conservation — in brief towards a distinctively archival training.

For these reasons, the archives stream in the librarianship qualification did not appeal to me. Miss M. Lukis wrote in 1965 that "a certain number of archivists are still opposed to certification through the Library Association of Australia."[2] This view still prevailed at the Victorian State Archives in 1971, re-inforced by the no doubt unjustified view that our library masters were mistreating us and working to delay or prevent separation. This attitude, of course, underlay the reticence of the office towards *Archives and Manuscripts* as well, upon which Mr R. C. Sharman has commented.[3]

Now, with separation, there is no class of library overlords to be blamed for any shortcomings in administration at the office, and paranoia towards librarians can only be counter-productive. So archivists there for the time being might look towards the archives stream of the library qualification with greater objectivity. Surely a person who has studied in that stream is likely to be more competent than the same person without that training? And the need for the best possible administration at State level in Victoria at present is very great, since observers will be watching to see whether the innovative legislation of the Public Record Act 1973 leads to better administration or not. If it doesn't, the "victory in Victoria" will prove to have been pyrrhic.

So the L.A.A. archives stream was not for me. The second main

option I considered was to seek employment at the Commonwealth Archives where, it was reputed, in-service training was taken more seriously and directed more accurately at practical problems than the training which I had received in 1968 at the Victorian State Archives. There, the in-service training had comprised a month or so seated at a typist's table in the office under instructions to read Jenkinson, Schellenberg, Posner, and the Proceedings of a Seminar on Records Management which the office had run. Later, practical training consisted of accompanying, and then copying, other officers. There was no procedures manual, which as Mrs A. Enderby has pointed out, is a great help in the training of new staff.[4] But then, there were frequently no procedures worth putting in such a manual. Terms like "series" and "destroy at discretion" were frequently used, but they had not been defined, and different officers attached their own meanings to them. There were few finding aids and no numbering of records or shelves. The public often helped themselves to records without supervision. There was little security, and no conservation programme at all. There was no marking to distinguish records on restricted access. In short, there was little system to be in-service trained about. At best, Miss Lukis's view of in-service training programmes in 1965 was true of Victoria between 1968 and 1971: "A serious disadvantage of them is that they are so often limited to experience in and knowledge of the procedures of one institution only."[5] In-service training could only offer a solution if I left the office or instigated something there: the latter proprosal however was not countenanced.

A third possibility which attracted me was the possibility of an eclectic programme of study composed of bits and pieces from here and there. "Archives Theory and History", "Archives Administration", "Archive Organization and Management" and "Data Processing" could be studied as L.A.A. subjects. A major in "Records Administration" was to be offered by the Prahran College of Advanced Education.[6] The machinery and structure of government could be studied in the context of the public administration course. There were fairly solid disadvantages to this approach, of course. There would be a lack of overall co-ordination and direction; there would be chopping and changing among teaching institutions; there would be no certificate or diploma at the end. On the other hand, the instruction in each subject could be expected to come from specialists rather than generalists. It was an intriguing prospect: I sometimes wonder whether this sort of eclecticism might not form the basis of a kind of ersatz archival training in places where the genuine article is not available.

Finally I decided that the University College London postgraduate Diploma in Archives Studies was the qualification which best met the criteria I had in mind. It was a distinctively archival qualification; it was an established course with 25 years' teaching behind it, though not 25 years out of date because of the new Syllabus adopted in 1971; it had strong local resources to draw upon; it led to a well-recognized piece of paper; it would provide a break from work which might allow reflection. The main misgiving I had (apart from cost and disorganization) lay in the view some Australian archivists had expressed to me that it would lack relevance to Australian conditions. For example, Mr

Piggott had written, "Language prerequisites — at least in the case of Britain — reflect the nature of archival material to be found in English repositories."[7] Perhaps this material would have other strange esoteric and inapplicable reflections. Local Jeremiahs assured me that I would find English archival training befuddled with medievalism. Of course it turned out to be the local Jeremiahs who were befuddled. In the May 1972 edition of this journal Mr A. G. Watson of the University College School cleared up some of the more common misconceptions. In a letter to the editor, Mr Watson made the point that the University College Diploma caters for students in three distinct streams (traditional, modern and overseas) through the choice of electives offered. "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," he wrote.[8] Far from being limited to medieval concerns, the course was flexible and modern — "Medieval Latin" was available in it, but so were "Records Management" and "Information Studies".

The basic notion of the 1971 University College Diploma is of course of the "Core plus electives" type, in contrast to the type of Diploma course in which all students follow an identical syllabus. The choice of core subjects in courses of this type can probably be taken as an indication of what the designers of the course saw as fundamental. In this instance, the three core subjects were "Record Office Management", "Records Management" and "The Preparation of Finding Aids".

In the first of these core subjects "Record Office Management", archival theory and practice, history and legislation were dealt with together, where elsewhere they are studied separately. As I have indicated, theory and practice (though not legislation) were among the more pressing deficiencies in knowledge where I had been working.

The presence of "Records Management" as one of the fundamental trio also coincided with my requirements. Whatever other faults it may have had, the Victorian State Archives in the late sixties was operating in records management: disposal schedules were being prepared; workshop-seminars were being held; no-one dissented from the theorem that "selection is the archivist's birthright". We felt, I think rightly, that an under-emphasis of records management was a hallmark of a librarian's approach to archives — since it was an activity which had no direct parallel in that profession.

I also had no quarrel with the presence in the core of the course of the subject called "The Preparation of Finding Aids", for the opposite reason. Where I had worked, finding aids had been few and inconsistent; publication of them had been discouraged as it might attract customers who could not be coped with, or lend credit to the library, neither of which was desired. Moreover, time spent on "processing", including finding aids, was criticised as being time not spent in departments — it was seen as an emphasis on the "antiquarian" rather than what was termed the "service function" side of the work. "The Preparation of Finding Aids" was then an appropriate study for one largely ignorant of the theory of it.

The balance of the Diploma — aside from these three core subjects — was to be found in a choice of six from a range of fourteen electives.

I have listed the whole of the subjects in an appendix, but here I would like to set out a selection which a typical "overseas" candidate might choose:—

Core Subjects	*Elective Subjects*
Record Office Management	Administrative History, Overseas
Records Management	Historical and Bibliographical Sources — Overseas
Preparation of Finding Aids	Information Studies
Special Lectures	Local Government Organization
Bookbinding	(Report in lieu of two subjects)

Another subject in the overseas stream which I have not shown is "Reading and Interpretation of Documents — Foreign Languages" — but at the time of writing Strine and Aborigine are unavailable under this heading

To what extent did these elective units satisfy criteria of relevance, of catering for distinctively archival requirements, and of modernity?

The unit in "Information Studies" should be mentioned first. The general relevance of a computer unit is not to be questioned. The Public Service is one of the great computer users; archivists working with modern records are frequently faced with the problems of adapting their methodology to deal with computerised information — which tends to be in difficult formats, which updates itself autonomously, which is intractable without the appropriate machinery. And as Mr P. D. Wilson has shown in these columns,[9] there are various long-standing archival problems to which computers offer good answers. Since places like the U.K. Public Record Office (with its PROSPEC and other systems) and the East Sussex County Record Office (with its PARC) are among the leaders in the field, London is a good place to study these things. This was then, a relevant, distinctively archival, and up-to-date unit.

"Administrative history — overseas" and "Historical and Bibliographical Sources — overseas" were two of the elective units in which the problem of relevance for overseas archivists studying in London was confronted head-on. Administrative history is difficult enough to teach in the country whose administrative history is being studied. There is, as Mr H. J. Gibbney has pointed out, a shortage of published material; there is a blurring of boundaries between constitutional and administrative history.[10] In fact, government archivists are among the few who are in a position to gain a more than superficial grasp of the complexities of the administrative history of the government whose records they keep. But how can a course in such an idiographic subject be mounted at a distance? Should Mr Gibbney's suggestion that such courses be aimed at the method rather than the substance of administrative history be adopted?[11] Naturally, the course at London did tend to emphasize the diplomatic and constitutional aspects rather than on local administrative structure and evolution. The subject at London is operated on the chameleon principle, changing its colour according to the locality from which the overseas students at a particular time originate. In 1972-73, in honour of Miss Rosemary Collier and myself, it assumed an "Australasian" colour.

So too did the course in "Historical and Bibliographical Sources—Overseas". Here the problem of relevance was overcome by reason of the Lecturer's expertise. At the same time, it is true that the range of published material in this field extends far beyond what is available in Australian administrative history. I am aware that elsewhere more than one subject of bibliography is thought to be appropriate in archival training. There is therefore a sense in which it could be said that the special attention which the London course pays to records management, finding aids and administrative history is something at the expense of further bibliographical study. I am inclined to the view that there is a place for some staff with extensive bibliographical knowledge in any large archival institution, but perhaps the London compromise makes more sense for the standard trained archivist, if there is to be such an animal one of these days. And I think that this is one of the areas where archivists need librarians (to reverse the dependence described in a recent issue of this journal). Although Mr Piggott as one of his guidelines for archival training[12] has stipulated that such training should be dispensed by archivists rather than by librarians or historians, I feel that this generally wise guideline needs to be suspended when it comes to the teaching of knowledge about sources. There, I am convinced from experience, a librarian, historian, or librarian/historian is likely to be an excellent teacher. In my own case a double major in history and a few years working in archives had equipped me with a fairly broad ignorance of historical and bibliographical sources: and the London instruction was the most considerable lessening of that ignorance which I have so far been able to obtain. It was another relevant, useful, and thoroughly interesting study.

A further element of flexibility for overseas students in a course which already could be tailored almost bespoke for them, was that such candidates could elect to tender a report or essay in lieu of up to two of the elective subjects. This, it seems to me, is a fairly vital element underlying the course's ability to be relevant. Particularly if the trainee has had experience working in archives, there will be areas of practical or theoretical concern to him which systematic and supervised study and reflection can assist to clarify. With the superb archival publication collection of the London University library paleography room to hand, this optional report can become one of the most stimulating elements of the training. For my part, I was able to pursue some questions of archival statistics and economics which had been an unrequited interest for some time. And it was possible for a supervisor to be found whose experience included work in precisely that field. Adequate supervision can make or break research: one of the advantages of London for archival research is that there is so much archival work in progress there, that the possibility exists of adequate supervision in archival research, even in relatively idiosyncratic areas.

Besides the examinable parts of the course, there were placements, visits, and a course in practical bookbinding. The practical bookbinding was taken by Mr Sidney Cockerell, who had a small practice bindery in the English Department at University College. The choice of institutions for placements and visits was wide. The placements I had each offered the chance to work in a part of the archival profession

which was new to me, e.g. to work on the identification and listing of private manuscripts. The preparation of lists under expert supervision; long discussions with colleagues; practice in the routines of other archival organizations were all thus the subject of experiental learning. Experiental learning was also the approach in the pleasant afternoons in Mr Cockerell's bindery, where the weekly opportunity to substitute handcraft for formal instruction provided a welcome change.

For the formal instruction was just that. In most cases, instruction was by formal lecture, and assessment by rigorous assignment and formal examination. Although, as I have argued, the substance of the instruction was contemporary, the method of imparting it was generally conservative. Some lecturers endeavoured to increase the degree of interchange between lecturers and students, but it seemed as though the local students were unaccustomed to learning through discussion. The furniture of the building and its arrangement in traditional style re-inforced the conservative manner of instruction I think: there were none of the trapezoidal tables and other paraphernalia which express modern teaching methods, as I understood them. Despite this, rigorous conservative instruction can cover ground quickly: rigour is a better motivator and greater humbler of know-alls than its alternatives. So I rather enjoyed the style of instruction though unaccustomed to it, and though not a practitioner of it myself.

On reflection, I think that there are two great virtues of the U.C.L. course, one readily copyable, and one unique. The virtue which can be copied is that the course has a sound overall structure; good individual syllabi; and the staff of specialists needed to run it. The second great virtue cannot be reproduced: that is what might be termed the "back-up resources" of the course. There is, for example, a good collection of archival publications in the U.C.L. library; half a mile away at London University's Senate House there is an outstanding collection. There are archival institutions of every possible type close at hand for visits and placements — archives small and large; government and business; church and union. There is a huge pool of archival expertise at hand to staff units, to give advice and supervision, and to provide a professional environment for the course to operate in. There are extra courses of specialised instruction available in fields like conservation at other institutions. And finally, there is the established pattern of foreign students coming there to study, bringing different approaches with them from various parts of the world.

There are also serious drawbacks to be considered by Australian archivists who might think of studying there. There is a flat rate levy of $500 imposed on all foreign students studying in the U.K. This is good sense as public finance, but bad news for the community of knowledge. Housing in London is exorbitantly priced, and unsatisfactory at lower prices. Wages are low, if part-time work must be sought for subsistence. And perhaps most importantly, overseas study of any prolonged duration means an hiatus in employment — a loss perhaps of seniority, salary or employment. A scholarship or some sort of employer subsidy is really necessary for it to be practical.

Among the back-up resources I've mentioned, there is one which I would like to describe more fully, and that is the availability of

courses in bookbinding and archive repair at the London College of Printing. My wife and I were able to put in 9 hours a week there without overlapping greatly with the U.C.L. course. These practical courses, conducted by master craftsmen with a high ratio of staff to students, and subsidized by the Greater London Council, provide a unique opportunity to learn practical conservation. This is an area where we have so far to go, that it merits the greatest emphasis in archival training, not to mention practice. At London, a student can study it in the subject "Record Office Management"; and practise it both under Cockerell at U.C.L. and separately in courses at the College of Printing; and can obtain placements in conservation sections of record offices. Having done this, I was disappointed to find a stony silence and total uninterest when I returned to work here. Though, to be fair, I should add that this attitude was not restricted to what I had learned about conservation, but to the rest as well.

Unexpectedly, the benefits of this pleasant and instructive year in London have turned out to be exclusively personal. On my return from overseas, I found my duties at work reduced in scope, and the studies I had undertaken regarded as "a lot of . . ." So an indirect effect of them was to contribute to my departure from the archival field. "Ah well, I suppose it had to come to this", as Ned Kelly remarked when terminating his relations with the Victorian Government by stepping through a trapdoor.

The professional trapdoor or perhaps ejector seat is the last point I'd like to comment on. What does an archivist do when the time comes to resign? 25% of the staff of the Victorian Public Record Office have faced this question this year. Unfortunately, the archival profession is a very small one, which means that the archivist is particularly dependent upon his employer. Traditionally, archivists have seen the need for a professional ejector seat or trapdoor in the form of a dual qualification — such as the dual registration in archives and librarianship offered by the L.A.A. In the past, I've always regarded this as something which would militate against the development of archival professionalism and separate consciousness. But is there any other way of ending the undue dependence of the archivist upon his employer (who may hold a virtual monopoly of archival employment in an area)? For such dependence is, I am afraid, an invitation to an imperfect relationship between the two. Against this, a highly specialised training offers no defence.

References

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11. *ibid.*
12. *ibid.*, p. 30.

Appendix

COURSE STRUCTURE OF U.C.L. POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN ARCHIVES STUDIES (1971 syllabus)

Core Subjects

1. Record Office Management.
2. Records Management.
3. Preparation of Finding Aids.

Elective Subjects

4. Administrative History—English, Early.
5. Administrative History—English, Modern.
6. Administrative History—Overseas.
7. Reading and Interpretation of Documents—English, Medieval.
8. Reading and Interpretation of Documents—English, Modern.
9. Reading and Interpretation of Documents—Foreign Languages.
10. Description of Medieval Documents.
11. Law of Real Property.
12. Local Government Organization.
13. Historical and Bibliographical Sources—England and Wales.
14. Historical and Bibliographical Sources—Overseas.
15. History and Development of Company Law and Accounting.
16. History and Literature of Science and Technology.
17. Information Studies.

(For overseas students, Essay or Report in lieu of up to two elective subjects.)

Special Lectures

18. Medieval Latin.
19. Bookbinding.