

At the time when the series is scheduled for disposal, the Department is contacted and if they are agreeable, then the disposal recommendation listed on the form is carried out.

There is nothing particularly new or different in a theoretical sense about the system we are adopting. It is simply an attempt to devise a more accurate and more complete method of registering the records so that access to information may be more speedily obtained. Naturally the system is still evolving and we hope to correct and improve it where necessary as we try to put it into practice over the next few years. We also expect to face some initial user resistance from researchers accustomed to dealing with our card catalogues. However, so far the system appears to be working well and we are optimistic that this is at least a step in the right direction.

REFERENCES

1. For a detailed description of this system see Robert Sharman's Article "An experiment in Archives classification" in *Archives and Manuscripts*, 2(6) April 1964.
2. See J. Carroll's article "To catalogue or not to catalogue: The Subject Form catalogue of the Queensland State Archives", in *Archives and Manuscripts*, 4(1) Nov. 1969.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVAL SERVICES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

by P. J. Crush

The following article represents a critique of the relevant sections of the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Public Service of South Australia (the Corbett Committee).

On May 23, 1975, the South Australian Government invited written comment on the report of the Committee of Inquiry. The unsigned comments on pp. 129-30 of the August issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* prompted me to refer to the Editor of this journal my own comment on those sections of the report which deal with records management and archives. My comment was as follows:

The Committee of Inquiry recognized the importance of good communications in transacting the government's business. In appendix 9/1 to the Report, the Committee listed specifically some of the criticisms levelled at the "docket system" which I assume, comprises the major part of the S.A. Public Service's records management system.

The Committee has suggested the following changes to improve the public service's records management programme and to enable it to take its place as an important part of the service's information system.

- a. Create a Records Management Services Division within a Government Information Department "which would have planning and co-ordination responsibilities for related activity throughout the Public Service" (p. 176). It would (a) introduce new methods to departments, (b) gain the confidence of management and (c) establish good working relationships with

- departments. It should also ensure that departmental managers play a major part in planning new records management systems (p. 177).
- b. The establishment of a project team to devise a programme of development for records management (p. 177).
 - c. Employ a senior consultant with wide experience in the government information field to report on providing improved information services within the Public Service and to the community (p. 181).
 - d. Solution of storage and accessibility problems by using microform or the computer (p. 175). Microform advisory service to become part of the Records Management Services Division (p. 177) and the Public Service Board ADP Centre to play an increasingly important role in the storage, integration and retrieval of information although it is not recommended that the ADP Centre be separated from the PSB (p. 176).
 - e. Appoint information managers to key positions within departments with direct access to permanent heads; their responsibilities to include (a) records management (b) resource centres and (c) publications and other internal and external information activity (p. 178).
 - f. Establish an Intermediate Records Repository outside the central business district for the storage of files and dockets of limited use within departments to reduce the number of papers consuming expensive office space and also ensure that records, at present deteriorating in poor conditions, are salvaged and adequately stored (p. 176-7).
 - g. Establish an efficient delivery service between the Intermediate Records Repository and user departments.
 - h. Separate government archives from private archives, the latter to remain the responsibility of the State Library (p. 176).

COMMENTS ON SUGGESTIONS

- a. The Report of the Committee of Inquiry has not been at all specific about the role and functions of "government archives" nor has it specified the relationship of the government archives with the remainder of the public service, particularly its relationship with the Records Management Services Division. I mention this point because in at least two of the world's largest archival establishments, those of Canada and the United States of America, the equivalent of the proposed Records Management Services Division is a division of their respective archival establishments. There is good reason for this arrangement. Archives are repositories for the storage of records considered to be worthy of permanent preservation. The basic principles on which archives administration are based are those of *respect des fonds* (i.e. respect for the original grouping and arrangement of records imposed on the records at the time of their creation and use) and of *provenance*. (i.e. the administrative origin of records and the administrative context in which the records performed their function of recording decisions and action taken.) Archives establishments are, therefore, intimately involved in and concerned with the ways records are managed. Because no one docket/file can be separated from others created in the same series or sequence of files without losing some of its evidential value all records held in an archives must be retained in their original order and their original context must be made obvious or be recorded in the specialized finding aids prepared by archivists. The preparation of specialized finding aids by archivists has been made extremely difficult because of the necessity to reconstruct original order and determine the original context of records decades after the event. It is this need to know about records management which justifies the inclusion of records management functions within an archival establishment. The archivist also has a great pool of experience to call on in assisting departments with their records management problems. As archivists will ultimately be responsible for the custody of all types of records including machine readable records they must keep up with the latest developments in records technology. The cobweb image of an archives does not, or should not bear any resemblance to fact.

- b. It is not clear from page 177 of the Report whether the two main areas of concern listed are identified for the consideration of the above project project team it seems obvious that, in addition to representatives of the agencies mentioned, the membership of the team must include at least one representative of the librarianship profession.

In devising a programme of development for records management I hope that the project team will take into consideration the fact that from the archivist's, historian's and perhaps public's point of view *all* government records are potentially an important part of this State's cultural heritage until such time as they have been vetted by a suitable authority ([perhaps a senior departmental officer in consultation with] the state archivist) in conformity with laid down criteria as either being worthy of permanent preservation or retention for a period to satisfy administrative need, then destroyed.

Most public servants lose sight of the need to look after records. They take them for granted and use them to achieve administrative objectives. This is as it should be provided that somebody is responsible for safeguarding the records.

Any records management programme should take into account *every* step from the creation of any record to its destruction or selection as an archive, not stop when the record is no longer required for current business.

Although Appendix 9/1 does put forward some useful suggestions for the improvement of the docket system it does not lay down any basic principles for good records management.

The demands placed on a department's records differ from department to department. A records manager must be sufficiently trained and experienced to know how to manage the department's records so that they satisfy individual departmental needs.

The project team must look elsewhere than Appendix 9/1 for the principles on which to base a flexible records management programme.

- c. No comment.

- d. Microform is unlikely to solve storage problems created by existing records unless the government agrees that the microform record retains all the necessary evidence which is inherent in existing records. e.g. symbols too small or too faint to reproduce clearly, nature of the material on which records are now kept, e.g. holes and watermarks in paper, card or parchment which can assist in identifying material and in providing some clues to its context. If the government does not agree the originals will not be able to be destroyed. The introduction of the use of microform records as a day to day medium in recording transactions may alleviate storage problems in the future.

- e. A similar scheme was adopted by the Australian Public Service in 1957 when it introduced the Registrars Scheme. The Registrar was an officer located in the central office of each department at the middle management level and was responsible for all organizational and procedural matters relating to all of that department's registries.

The most obvious difference between the Registrar and the proposed Information Manager is that the latter is to have direct access to the permanent head; rendering the position one of considerable influence. This factor could well render the Information Manager far more successful than the Registrar has been. The Registrar Scheme has not been a success.

I can see at least two major difficulties with the proposed positions. One would be qualifications and experience. The Information Manager would need wide experience in records management, be a qualified librarian and something of a public relations officer. The other could be a tendency to become introverted, to become inflexible and bound by departmental traditions.

The suggested high level of status and considerable knowledge of the occupant of this position would also make him/her good management material and the turnover of staff in the position could be fairly rapid which could be detrimental to the effectiveness of the position.

If, however, the Records Management Service was part of the Government Archives it would be able to provide a consistent well qualified and experienced advisory service to Information Managers.

team. If information Resource Centres are to be considered by the The project team considering the proposed positions of Information Manager would also need to recognize that library and records management services involve separate skills and procedures although they do have the retrieval of information in common.

I do agree that the Information Manager concept should improve departmental records management and library services to a marked degree.

- f. As indicated in the comments on (b. above) records passed to the custody of an Intermediate Records Repository would be "in limbo" between the originating department and the Government Archives. The decision as to what should be an archive and what should not is, in most cases, an arbitrary one often based on the demands for research resources made by researchers. These demands change and it is the archivist who is most aware of them because of his daily contact with researchers.

It is therefore important that the principles of respect des fonds and provenance mentioned in (a. above) should be observed in the Intermediate Records Repository in the event that a proportion of the intermediate records will become archives as a result of the review of decisions to destroy material after a given period.

With these factors in mind it is my opinion that the Intermediate Records Repository should come under the control of the Government Archivist.

- g. No comment.

- h. In my comments in (a. above) I emphasized the fact that the Report has indicated, by inference only, that government archives are to be part of the Records Management Services Division of the Government Information Department. I have endeavoured in (a. above) to support the contention that Records Management Services should be part of the Government Archives and I would like to suggest that a semi autonomous State Archives and Record Service be established and form a division of the Premier's Department where it could "achieve administrative economies and greater co-ordination of development" (p. 120).

The Government Information Department is portrayed as a department "To meet new and urgent needs for information in the Public Service and in the community" (p. 176). Government Archives are rarely needed to provide *urgent* information for the public service and even if they are, these demands would probably be directed at the Intermediate Records Repository, the proposed efficient delivery service of which would enable this information to be provided. The Information Managers could rely on the Government Archives to assist with research into the history of departments for the preparation of any publications.

It seems therefore that the devising of a programme of development for records management is the first step in improving departments' ability to provide information and that any such programme may be put into practice by departmental Information Managers using the advisory services of the Records Management Service of the State Archives and Record Service and, for Resource Centres, the advisory services of the State Library.

I would draw to your attention the status of the Victorian Public Record Office, the British Public Record Office, and the Canadian Archives which all have considerable autonomy and are not subordinated to a Records Management Services division but are responsible for establishing and maintaining standards of records management as is the National Archives and Records Service of the United States of America.

I agree that private archives should be separated from government archives and remain the responsibility of the State Library but urge that they be under the control of a professional archivist.