

# Establishment Of An Archive At Mosman Church Of England Preparatory School

Beverley Lindley

Archivist, Mosman Church of England  
Preparatory School

## **Background**

Mosman Church of England Preparatory School was founded in 1904 by Mr. A. H. Yarnold and was owned by the Yarnold family until 1977 when a public company was formed. The School is now administered by a School Council. The School has an enrolment of approximately 200 boys from 5 to 12 years, commencing with a transition class in the infants' department through to 6th form. The original enrolment of approximately 20 boys increased rapidly with fluctuations over the years due to the 1st and 2nd World Wars and the depression. The 75th Anniversary of the School and the Headmaster, Mr. Ian Begbie's, interest in the School's history, with the encouragement of the School Council, were the main reasons for the establishment of an archive.

As very little had been done in the past 75 years to keep together any information relating to the life of the School, I commenced the work of establishing an archive by gathering together all the material which had been kept at the school in odd boxes, files, cupboards etc. Unfortunately much of the material of real historical interest had been lost or destroyed although donations from members of the Yarnold family and old boys have helped in providing an overall picture of the past life of the school.

In establishing a system and setting up the archive I drew heavily on the knowledge and experience of others. I owe much to Mrs. Georgina Hart and Miss Diana Simpson of Sydney Church of England Grammar School, Mr. Felton of Cranbrook, Mr. Peter Orlovich and Ms. Baiba Irving of the University of New South Wales. I also studied papers presented at an Archives Day at Shore in 1977, by Mr. Peter Orlovich, Mrs. Betty Goodger, Ms. Dianne Patenall, Ms. Baiba Irving, Mr. D. Roman, Mr. Neville Corbett and Mr. A. J. DeV. Hill.<sup>1</sup>

I found that school archives differ in a number of ways from purist archives and also differ from school to school. Unlike large institutions, companies or Government Departments it is very difficult to establish

the provenance of many items in a school collection and also very difficult with some items, to maintain original order. Working within the guidelines laid down by Mr. Peter Orlovich, I consider it necessary to adopt an individual approach for each school archive, taking into account:

- (a) the purpose of the archive for the particular school;
- (b) the way in which the archive is to be used;
- (c) the long term administration of the archive following its establishment;
- (d) the security and storage facilities available at the school;
- (e) the material available for inclusion in the archive;
- (f) the material expected to be received once the archive has been established.

Bearing in mind that there are no hard and fast rules for the establishment of school archives, any system will need to be varied to suit the particular school.

### **Purpose Of The Archive**

The main purpose of the archive at Mosman Prep. is to provide a history of the school and its activities. The archive is also to provide a source of reference for students and teachers and a source of reference should historical information be required in the event of future building, changes of school policy or litigation related to either the school or persons at any time connected with the school. The archive also provides a method of locating and keeping in touch with past students and staff.

### **Use And Administration Of The Archive**

Mr. Orlovich recommends that the archives be deposited in the custody of one person (who may be designated School Archivist) or a small committee of persons (which may be designated the Archive Committee) either of whom should have responsibility for the care, custody, control and management of the archive.

It was the desire of our Headmaster that the archive have limited access and be solely administered by the Archivist. While the archive has limited access, to fulfill its purpose as a source of reference, certain material has to be made available when necessary. Persons wishing to refer to any archival material must firstly have the permission of the Headmaster and then have the material retrieved by the Archivist.

A borrowing register has been provided for this purpose. This register is divided into columns as follows: Date of Borrowing; Accession No; Description; Signature of Borrower; Date Returned; Archivist's Signature. Each item is signed for by the person borrowing and on return the Archivist's signature and date of return are noted. Each borrower is given an instruction as to the careful handling of the item. Certain items are not available for borrowing due to their sensitive nature, fragile condition or historical value.

### **Security And Storage Facilities**

It is acknowledged that archives should be accommodated in one location, which is secure, well lit, air conditioned or well ventilated or one which allows the free circulation of air. It should be easily accessible and allow for sufficient flexibility in the utilization of the storage accommodation to enable archival material to be housed separately from other records not classified as archives.

Facilities at Mosman Prep. fell far short of these requirements. However, a secure room containing a fire-proof filing cabinet and open steel shelving was available. Making use of what I had, a number of cardboard archive boxes were acquired to fit on the steel shelving and each item is placed in a glassine bag and stored either in an archive box or in the filing cabinet. I am aware of the involved and expensive processes necessary for the most effective preservation of archival material, but finances were not available either for the materials necessary or the manpower required. As a result care is being taken to make each item as free from mildew and dust as possible before placing it in a glassine bag for storage. As funds become available it is certainly intended to take a more serious approach to conservation and it is hoped that a proper archive room will be built when future building works are undertaken at the school.

### **Types Of Records Available For Inclusion In The Archive**

As the Archive was established with limited access and with the Headmaster's complete confidence in the Archivist, all school records have been made available for inclusion. In many schools this would not be the case as official records are kept separately either in the Headmaster or Bursar's office or in the case of Government Schools, returned to the Departmental Headquarters.

The types of records in the archive at Mosman Prep are:

- Student application forms and records,
- Letters relating to students, staff and the general running of the School,
- Photographs,
- Newscuttings,
- Class rolls,
- Building plans,
- Minute books and correspondence relating to the School Council, Ladies' Auxiliary and Parents Friends' Association,
- Sporting records,
- Bursar's records,
- School Magazine,
- Concert programmes,
- Invitations and printed material associated with individual school activities,
- Relics or memorabilia.

Once it was made known to the public that an archive had been established, many old boys and their relatives made donations. These donations mainly consisted of photographs, sporting certificates and pennants, school reports, newscuttings, programmes of school concerts, trophies and pieces of uniform. While many items have been donated, some are presented on permanent loan and the accession register is noted accordingly. I am confident these donations will continue and the amount of material received increase as the establishment of the archive is more widely known in the school community.

### **Filing Method**

Consideration was given to the merits of four basic archival systems: Classified Arrangement; Numerical Arrangement; Subject (Alphabetical) Arrangement; Chronological Order.

#### *Classified Arrangement*

This system is complex and time consuming to design and can only be justified where there is access to the collection, through browsing, such as in a library.

#### *Numerical Arrangement*

In this system everything is recorded in an accession register upon receipt and the accession number becomes the location number of the item. The shelf arrangement, therefore, is by date of receipt. This system requires a good finding aid as there is no bringing together of like things on the shelf.

#### *Subject Arrangement*

A subject self-indexing arrangement can be used for an open or closed access situation, although there are advantages in an open access situation. This system is especially suitable for photographs and newscuttings. The need to design a controlled list of subject headings is essential to ensure efficient retrieval.

#### *Chronological Order*

Both space available and the manner in which school archival material is received make it nearly impossible to use a chronological system of filing.

I concluded that the best system to be used at Mosman Prep. was the numerical arrangement. This system, as described above, involves each item being recorded in an Accession Register upon receipt and allocated an accession number. The accession number then becomes the location number of the item.

Our Accession Register is a large book, drawn up in columns showing: Accession No; Date Received; Provenance; Conditions of Receipt; Correspondence; Remarks. As this system, while, simple, requires a good finding aid, I have organised a system with an index card for each item. These cards are filed in alphabetical order under major subject headings, the subject headings being descriptive of the type of material filed. These major headings are then broken down into further subject

headings within each category e.g. SPORT, Sport/Football, Sport/Tennis, Sport/Swimming etc., or STAFF, Staff/Headmasters, Staff/Teachers, Staff/Administrative etc.

The major subject headings in our finding aid are: Activities (Other than Sport); Administration; Benefactors; Buildings; Chronicle (the School Magazine); History of the School; Houses; Literature; Newscuttings; Photographs; Sport; Staff; Students. Some items of course will require cross-indexing under various headings and thus have a number of cards. The detailed information is recorded on the most relevant card with the cross-index cards being noted accordingly.

The cards for each item show:

- Accession No. (from the Accession Register);
- Title (type or form of document)
- Date or date range;
- Provenance (Source)
- Location
- Description.

While the system as outlined is adequate to file and find all material deposited in the archive I am also establishing a separate finding aid with a separate card for every student and member of staff who has been at the Schools. This finding aid will allow quick retrieval of information about individuals. I do appreciate that this would be an awesome, if not impossible, task at a large school.

Memorabilia or relics which do form part of school archives and are of great interest and historical value, are stored in the same area as the archive. They are catalogued within a separate system, following the same principles as outlined. Storage of these items is sometimes very difficult but taking their preservation into account, they are generally stored on shelves protected from the elements as effectively as possible.

### **Exhibitions**

Mosman Prep. archive has only been established for a short time and only one exhibition has been mounted. Much consideration was given to what would be displayed and how the display would be organised, realising that many rules of conservation relating to archival material would be broken in the process.

As the exhibition was for the 75th Anniversary of the School, the display was arranged in chronological order, allowing the public to follow the development of the School from its inception in 1904 to 1979. The small hall of the school was made available for the display, and double-sided easels were hired from Scots College. The easels had 6ft. by 4ft. display surfaces on legs approximately 3ft. long. I covered the display surfaces with a strong red paper and each item was mounted on this surface with Blu-tak. Old, precious and delicate items which were of public interest were displayed in sealed glass cases.

As each item was removed from the archive for inclusion in the exhibition it was recorded in a specially created book and given a number

which became a reference number as all items displayed had not been accessioned. The accession number of each item, when available, and a brief description were also noted in the book.

The exhibition consisted mainly of photographs, newscuttings, certificates, sporting pennants and photocopies of interesting and relevant documents which were too delicate to display.

Professional typesetting was done with large dates from 1904 to 1979 inclusive, printed in 3" numerals forming the heading for each section. The description for each item was also typeset, the description being prefixed by the reference number. The reference numbers were most important for the easy identification of material when the display was mounted.

When mounting the display I was fortunate to have the services of Mr. Ken Clifton, an Art Director and a parent at the School, who organised the material for each year in a block grid. This gave uniformity to the appearance and made for easy viewing and understanding of the material displayed. The easels were angled in a way which allowed easy viewing without physical contact. Having considered covering each board with plastic, I decided to leave them uncovered as I felt the damage which would have resulted through sweating etc. was far worse than could have been expected from the atmosphere.

I took the opportunity of having the public viewing old photographs to ask for their assistance in identifying some of the old boys and staff. Paper and pencils were provided, the paper being drawn into two columns so the person filling it in could note the reference number of the photograph in the column, the names in the other and then place the paper in a box provided. I also took the opportunity of asking for donations to the archive, particularly of photographs for the years where little was displayed. The response to this was most reassuring of the interest in the history of the School and therefore its archive.

### Conclusion

Taking into account the alternative methods of archive management and the requirements of the particular school, the numerical arrangement has proven to be effective for the Mosman Church of England Preparatory School.

### FOOTNOTE

1. Sydney Church of England Grammar School, *Archives Day: Saturday 9th July 1977*. (Sydney: Sydney Church of England Grammar School, 1977). See also *School Archives: Proceeding's of a Seminar, September 1979* (Sydney, Library Association of Australia, N.S.W. Branch, 1979).