Book Reviews

Establishing Government in Victoria: The Evidence of the Historical Record

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Pauline Jones, ed., *Historical records of Victoria:* Foundation Series (Editor-in-chief: Michael Cannon) Vol.1 Beginnings of permanent government. Illus. Victorian Government Printing Office, Melbourne, 1981. $15.50 (paperback), $22.95 (clothbound), $75.00 (Leatherbound). ISBN 0 7241 8242 (paperback), 0 7241 8247 (clothbound).

The present reviewer has had a long association with projects which aimed at the publication, *in extenso,* of historical documents; this association began in the early 1950s when the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, of which he was foundation Honorary Secretary, urged upon the Commonwealth Government the need for the publication of *Historical Records of Australia* to be resumed. That particular effort failed. It is interesting to note that many of the reasons advanced by the other side of the argument — that is, those who were opposed to the resumption — could have been urged against the publication, in this form, of foundation documents relating to Victoria, such as we are now seeing issued in *Historical records of Victoria* (HRV). It could have been argued that production of microfilm copies of original documents had rendered obsolete their reproduction in printed form; it could have been suggested that to transcribe the manuscript record into a printed form (involving, especially with difficult manuscripts, some measure of interpretation) would to some extent detract from the authenticity of the original record.

It could also have been argued that not all of the relevant records had come to light, and therefore to publish in 1981 would have been premature.

Whether or not these arguments were put forward in an effort to dissuade the Public Record Office of Victoria (whose project this is) from embarking upon this venture, the present reviewer does not know. It seems that there were those in high places in the Public Record Office, and presumably in the Treasury, who thought that better arguments existed for the project to go ahead. Chris Hurley, the present Keeper of Public Records, pays tribute in the foreword to the enthusiastic support of the first Keeper, Harry Nunn, whose foresight and vision must be credited with having initiated the project.

Comparisons with *HRA* are inevitable. For all its faults, Frederick Watson's multi-volume publication, brought out in the first quarter of the present century, was a scholarly work. The historical introductions were of enormous value, and the end-notes gave much additional data. The documents, though they could have been printed in an order more nearly reflecting the administrative framework of the period, and therefore conforming to *respect des fonds,* were arranged with some logic. Much has been discovered since the days when Watson did his editorial work, and some documents, regarded as confidential in the early 1900s, have now been released by the Public Record Office of Great Britain. However, it would be churlish not to recognise in Watson's work an outstanding example of historical editing. The indexes to each volume, like the Index to the volume of *HRV* at present being reviewed, were remarkably effective finding-aids.

It is necessary to understand what succeeding volumes in this series will cover, in order to make any sort of a judgement as to the balance reflected in the choice of documents covered in the first volume. As indicated above, volume 1 relates to the *Beginnings of Permanent Government.* The first 137 pages (apart from preliminaries) are devoted to Part I, which is also entitled "The beginnings of permanent government", and which covers topics quite appropriately classified as such — the claims of the Port Phillip Association, preparations for official settlement, origins of the Victorian public service, Governor Bourke's visit to Port Phillip, and so on. Pages 140 to 181 relate to the Commissariat Office — an instrument of government necessary in a fledgling settlement, though the appearance at this juncture of documents relating to it causes a mild surprise. Part III, however, relating to Law and Order, occasions even more surprise. Sections A and B of Part III seem to be necessary enough, dealing as they do with the organisation and development of the arms of government responsible for law and order. Section C, however,

which occupies pages 305 to 528, deals with police and court matters which, at least in the view of the present reviewer, do not merit the prominence they have been given in this volume.

The projected contents of the next six volumes in the Foundation Series give us a clue as to why there is such a heavy emphasis on Law and Order in the first volume. It appears that the subject of Law and Order could well have occupied a volume on its own, but did not quite assume sufficiently large proportions. Hence it was included in the *Beginnings* volume. The succeeding six volumes will be devoted to:

Aborigines
Public Works
Early Development of Melbourne
Communications, Trade and Transport
Crown Lands and Survey
Public Finance.

There is a good deal of merit in a publication of this sort indicating in the clearest possible way the whereabouts of the original documents. Certainly a volume published under the auspices of an archival agency should be punctilious in indicating sources. *HRV* shares with its predecessor a reticence relating to the attribution of sources. *HRV* is in fact somewhat worse than its distinguished predecessor. There is no clear statement against the individual document as to the series, or class, or record group, in which the original will be found. Worse still, one has to go to the Index to find a clue as to the provenance of many of the documents, and it is rare for an indication to be given as to the address from which a letter is written. To give a simple example. On page 196, a letter is printed from Matthew Forster, dated 1st November 1838, asking William Lonsdale if he could find a position for a former Chief Constable from Van Diemens Land, Henry Bonney, who has had to leave his position because he shot his wife's lover. We have to turn to the Index to discover that Forster was Chief Police Magistrate of Van Diemen's Land. Indeed there is no indication on page 196 that the letter has anything to do with Van Diemen's Land (except for a mention of Westbury, which the unschooled might be forgiven for believing to be in Ireland).

Occasionally in the introductions to sections one finds a note which betrays the location of the original, such as on page 64 where it is stated that ship's gunnery officer John Henry Norcock's original journal is held by the National Library in Canberra. In the acknowledgements on page *vi* we are told that certain institutions have provided facilities for research and have allowed the inclusion of their documents in the publication. The State Library of Victoria, the Victorian Department of Crown Lands and

Survey, the National Library, the Archives Authority of New South Wales, the State Library of New South Wales, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the British Museum (British Library?), and the Public Record Office of Great Britain, are mentioned. There is no clear indication against each document as to which of these institutions holds the original of that particular document, and I believe that the publication is the poorer for its failure to attribute its sources in this way.

The thematic treatment by which the documents are arranged is a mixed blessing. The arrangement of documents in *HRA,* by way of contrast, enabled the historian to make some judgements as to whether or not a particular letter or despatch had been answered, for instance. One could follow the sequence of events in the exchanges of despatches between the Governor or Lieutenant-Governor of a Colony, and the Secretary of State in Downing Street. It is quite impossible to follow any sequence whatever in *HRV.* We have no information as to whether or not we are looking at a series, or whether we are in fact being treated to the editor's fanciful selection of documents, chosen to be representative of a great mass of material which could not be published in its entirety. We are, in fact, altogether at the mercy of the editor, who seems to have chosen the documents in order to suit the whim of the moment. We are certainly not given any indication of the principles that lie behind the selection policy.

HRA has been mentioned again and again in this review, and I had no idea that I would find so much in it to admire. Each volume in that that series attempted to cover correspondence of a certain type within a given time-frame. These periods were indicated clearly on the title page, and if one were tracing a letter which one knew to have been written at a particular time, one knew where to look. There will be difficulties for the scholar looking in *HRV* for a particular document, which he knows to have been written on a particular date. The date coverage of the first volume in this series is not stated on title page or foreword; the best indication one can get is from the table of contents.

To have said so much in criticism of this publication might well have given the reader the view that it is altogether without redeeming feature. To draw this conclusion would be a serious error. I tried at the beginning to indicate that a great deal of credit should be given to any organisation which, in these days of high labour costs, can contemplate the publication of a work such as this. Much has been written in recent years about the serious problem that confronts archives institutions and libraries through the alarmingly high rate of deterioration of paper. Even in these days of heightened awareness of the value of original records, much of the

documentary heritage of this country is at risk. What we have preserved is but a fraction of the record originally created. Any effort that is made to preserve something of our past, and make it more fully available to scholars, deserves our strong commendation.

The production of microfilm copies of original records, and the publication in printed form of reproductions of them, are not competing or conflicting activities. They are complementary, and each of these projects will make it easier for scholars to understand our past. In view of the high cost of travel, scholars will increasingly appreciate the usefulness of publications such as *HRV,* and it is not unlikely that other projects of this nature will be established. In any criticism I make of the present publication, it should be borne in mind that the principal object is to make future ventures of this sort more effective, and more acceptable to scholars. If future volumes in the present series, and any other series that might be launched on these lines, are produced, it is possible that they might be the better for having been examined in the light of the standards established by such series as *HRA.*

Local Government Records

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Local Government Records in New South Wales. Papers from a Workshop and Seminar arranged by the L.A.A. and A.S.A., Library Association of Australia, Sydney, 1982. Available for $10.00 ($7.00 for L.A.A. and A.S.A. members) from Ms. P. Ward, 4 Lyons Street, Dover Heights, N.S.W. 2030.

The New South Wales Branch of the L.A.A. has, by publishing the papers of the combined A.S.A. Workshop and L.A.A. Seminar on local government records in New South Wales, performed a service of considerable benefit, not only in New South Wales but throughout Australia.

The volume may be seen as a primer on the preservation and use of local government records as it brings together in a most succinct way so many of the various factors affecting local government records.

The overriding impression left by the Papers is of the need to preserve local government records. There is a sense of urgency about the need to stop uncontrolled destruction and to provide resources appropriate to the preservation of local government archives. The current climate of financial constraint in which we must all work is clearly acknowledged and an effort is made in the Final Session to pursue a practical course of action. The comments by the Archives Office of New South Wales concerning proclamations under Section 2(3) of the New South Wales Archives Act may be seen as an indictment of the State Government's funding policy for archival matters; but it may equally be seen as a challenge to local government to accept responsibility for an area of its administration which has been too long neglected.

Baiba Irving's paper on concepts and functions introduces the reader to the terminology used in the remainder of the papers and is a beautiful example of the art of knowing when to stop. It is almost understatement but should aid the uninitiated and serve as something of a check list for the practitioners.

The experiences of both Janet Howse and Ken Smith are invaluable as they provide insight into the realities of archives administration in the Sydney City Council, the archival pioneer among local government bodies in Australia.

The basic educational value of the Papers, hinted at on the Contents page, is supported by brief papers of high quality on subjects such as technological change, microfilm records, basic conservation techniques and the role of the public library. The Appendices are a most useful inclusion, drawing together relevant existing legislation and details of policies and services available in New South Wales which would be of great assistance to the novice as well as drawing them together in a convenient way for ready reference by the serving archivist or records manager.

I found the Papers fresh and stimulating with the odd statement which made me think again. For example, Prof. Cable's "Libraries, even archives, are catering for the researcher into regional history," and Bernard Sargeant's ". . . one should also accept that an area such as Council records — pertaining solely to information — is one in which the Librarian should play a meaningful role."

The volume is well laid out, easy to read and has a cohesiveness which is often missing from a collection of pieces by a number of different authors from a diversity of working environments. I am wondering, however, whether the C.I.P. data should include the dates on which the workshop/seminar was held.

Local Government Records in New South Wales is a must for the Members' Room and Town Clerks' offices of all Australian local government bodies.

Computers and Archives

Christine Shergold
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Richard M. Kesner, ed., *Automation, Machine-Readable Records, and Archival Administration: An Annotated Bibliography*. Society of American Archivists, 1980. 65 pp. ISBN 0-931828-22-8. Available for $US4.00 to SAA members, and $US6.00 to others, from Publication Service, Society of American Archivists, 330 S. Wells, Suite 810, Chicago, Illinois, 60606, USA.

Carolyn Geda, Francis Blouin and Eric Austin, eds., *Archivists and Machine-Readable Records*. Society of American Archivists, 1980. 248 pp. ISBN 0-931828-19-8. Available for $US7.00 to SAA members, and $US10.00 to others, from Publication Service, Society of American Archivists, 330 S. Wells, Suite 810, Chicago, Illinois, 60606, USA.

Although there have been several bibliographies published on automation which have been geared to an archival audience, *Automation, Machine-Readable Records, and Archival Administration: An Annotated Bibliography* is the first which contains annotations. The brief annotations provided are useful because many of the publications on automation are not primarily designed for archivists.

The introduction to the bibliography includes a brief description of factors which have forced archivists to deal with the problems of automation as well as analyses of the current state of development and of the areas where further work is required (copyright law and privacy, automation as it relates to specific record types, appraisal of machine-readable records, archival security and building design as they relate to automated records). This section also includes a chart which analyses the distribution of the literature selected for inclusion by year and topic between 1957 and 1980: approximately two-thirds of the citations contained in the bibliography have been published since 1972.

The bibliography is designed to provide guidance for those "seeking a background in machine-readable records, the use of computers in information indexing and retrieval, and the direction of recent quantitative

research". It comprises 293 entries, drawn from fifty journals and a wide range of monograph literature, which are diverse in subject matter and varied in complexity. Asterisks have been used to indicate those items which require prior knowledge of computer programming or machine-readable records. Entries in the bibliography relate to automation generally, archives administration, records management, library administration and quantitative research with approximately 35% of the publications relating specifically to archives administration.

As perhaps could be expected, there is an extensive coverage of American literature with a large percentage of the works cited coming from American periodicals. Its scope, however, is broader with sources relating to English and Canadian developments also included. Unfortunately, excepting two items which refer to archival programmes in Israel and West Germany, developments in other countries are covered only in general sources such as *Proceedings of an International Seminar on Automatic Data Processing in Archives* (Item No. 27).

The bibliography is usefully supplemented by indexes to authors, journals and subjects. Whilst the contents of the bibliography will undoubtedly become dated more quickly than other areas of archival interest, the list of journals will continue to provide a guide for those interested in more recent developments and the subject index will continue to service those with particular needs.

All too frequently publications dealing with archival programmes involving machine-readable records and the utilisation of automation are not generally available outside the relevant institution. This factor limits the usefulness of this bibliography for the archivist who is more conversant with the subject of automation. The Public Record Office (London), for example, has produced the following publications which are not included in this bibliography: *The Public Record Office Machine-Readable Archive (A Provisional Specification), Provisional Guide to the Selection and Preparation for Transfer of Machine-Readable Records* and the *PRO-SPEC Manual*.

This bibliography is a generally useful work both for archivists who require an introduction to automation and for those who having gained some basic information wish to become better informed.

One of the publications which is not cited in the bibliography on automation is *Archivists and Machine-Readable Records*. This monograph is a compilation of papers presented at the Conference on Archival Management of Machine-Readable Records held at Ann Arbor, Michigan, from 7th to 10th February 1979. Representatives at this Conference included archivists who had developed at least partial solutions to the

problems posed by machine-readable records, scholars who were equipped to analyse the research value of records created in machine-readable form, computer specialists and social science data archivists.

The papers and discussion which were presented and took place during eight sessions of the Conference have been compressed into six chapters, each of which is prefaced with a brief introduction. The first chapter relates to the research opportunities of machine-readable records whilst the last assesses the implications of machine-readable records and technological change for archival practices. Aspects of records in machine-readable form dealt with in other chapters are archival programmes for machine-readable records, the management and dissemination of machine-readable data for social research, developments in computer technology and confidentiality and privacy.

The organisation of this volume is excellent — starting as it does with perspectives and potentials of machine-readable records for research studies. For scholars the increasing abundance and the manipulative nature of machine-readable records offer new opportunities for the investigation of social, economic, political and other developments. Three of the papers in this chapter are concerned with the research opportunities of machine-readable data based upon specific examination of the records produced by particular organisations. The final paper, by Meyer Fishbein, examines the changes in the kind of data available in machine-readable form and discusses the applicability of conventional archival appraisal criteria to machine-readable records. Fundamentally, this chapter poses the problems of the criteria which need to be used in assessing machine-readable records and the difficulties which the archivist may experience in trying to predict which machine-readable records currently being generated will be of value for future research.

The second chapter deals with programmes and procedures adopted for the management of machine-readable records in three national archival institutions (Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States), one state archives and a private corporation. Appraisal techniques, preservation requirements and storage conditions for records in machine-readable form are dealt with for each institution. The need for careful monitoring of the information on the machine-readable form along with the qualifications required by the staff working with this media are underlined.

As well as being highly informative, these papers emphasise the effects of machine-readable records upon standard archival practices. Inventorying machine-readable records while they are in use in the creating agency, ensuring the survival of the relevant supporting documentation, verifying the documentation, converting the machine-readable record into a stan-

dard format and medium (e.g., magnetic tape with 1600 bits per inch), and creating archival, as opposed to working/reference, copies are only a few of the different procedures shown to be imposed by machine-readable records on the archival institution. Further guidance in dealing with machine-readable records is provided in the next chapter in which two social science data archivists describe their respective data archives and document some of the procedures developed by them for dealing with information in machine-readable form.

The fourth chapter comprises papers which relate to developments in computer technology and deal with such topics as: alternative storage media, data base management, problems of non-compatibility, the impact of the extensive use of computers and training considerations for archivists. Frightening prospects for the archivist in the development of computer hardware are outlined by Gregory Marks in his paper:

> "Plainly, the decades ahead will be times of great difficulty for archivists. There will be enormous quantities of computer-based information, encompassing virtually all facets of business, government, education, and society. At the same time the variety of technical problems to be confronted in dealing with all this information will rapidly increase. While hardware will be much cheaper than today, archivists will have to cope with a much greater variety of machines, software, and human failings." (Page 155)

On the other hand, the developments outlined in these papers also are encouraging as they offer archivists the opportunity to utilise computer technology to assist in administrative and "intellectual" control over their holdings. As hardware becomes cheaper and the software more flexible and adaptable, computer-assisted or computer-produced finding aids and an on-line system for reference and control become more feasible.

By their potential accessibility, machine-readable records also pose fundamental problems in regard to the preservation of confidentiality and privacy. Practising archivists will be well aware of the effects of confidentiality and privacy on the accessibility of archival records. In the case of machine-readable records the problems of maintaining the confidentiality of an individual or an organisation may well rest with the archivist. Confidentiality or privacy constraints may well force the archivist to be involved in the "selective retrieval of records, development of disclosure-free samples, merging of data collections, and production of data tabulations". The papers in this chapter review the legal provisions bearing upon confidentiality and privacy as they relate to machine-readable records, examine the practices for protecting confidentiality employed by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and consider the implications of confidentiality and privacy constraints for research.

The final chapter, which deals with the implications of machine-readable records and technological change for archival practices, poses all the problems expected of machine-readable records and then some. It is stressed that although the concepts employed in handling paper records will be useful and applicable to records in machine-readable form, the way in which these concepts are applied to this form of record will need to be different. In dealing with machine-readable records, all aspects of archival work are affected — appraisal, arrangement and description, preservation, machine-readable records management, types of finding aids required, different documentation and reference service requirements are only some of these aspects. Briefly, the two papers in this chapter outline the ways in which traditional archival practices and procedures will need to change if machine-readable records are to be dealt with satisfactorily.

This monograph is extremely comprehensive in its treatment of machine-readable records. At the same time, the organisation of the work into six distinct chapters facilitates selective reading. Many archivists might wish to skip through the chapters dealing with advances in computer technology and research opportunities and concentrate upon archival programmes for machine-readable records and their implications for archival practices. This book allows this to be easily done.

Although it could not be classified as "enjoyable" reading, *Archivists and Machine-Readable Records* certainly is essential reading for any archivist who is likely to be affected by or who is interested in machine-readable records.

Indexing Manuscripts

Michael Piggott
Australian War Memorial

J. P. Hudson, *Manuscript Indexing,* Department of Manuscripts, The British Library, London, 1979, 3rd impression 1980. Available for £2.00 including postage from the Head of Large Collections, Department of Manuscripts, British Library, Great Russell Street, London, WC1B, 3DG, England.

Manuscripts Indexing as stated in the Preface, is "a guide to the current practice of the Department of Manuscripts in compiling the printed indices to the *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum (Library)"*. It mainly consists of rules for making name, place and subject index entries ("headwords"), which are prepared directly from the original manuscripts rather than the descriptions of accessions in the *Catalogue.* Procedures for amplifying the headwords in various ways are also provided, and there are a few pages each on uncertain/doubtful information and filing. Finally, in the Appendices there are rules on typeface, abbreviations, arranging manuscripts, and dating manuscripts.

In view of the similarities between *Manuscripts Indexing* and the do-it-yourself mechanic's bible, the workshop manual, and given the very brief treatment of Hudson's work in the *Journal of the Society of Archivists,* one is tempted to wonder whether there is anything at all to be said about it. There are, in fact, several grounds for welcoming its appearance in 1979.

For one, even though a good deal of manuscripts indexing, particularly of correspondence, is undertaken in Australian manuscript libraries, very little writing has appeared here on the subject. In addition, no Australian library or archives has yet published their own procedures for manuscript indexing, although undoubtedly a number would exist as in-house manuals. J. P. Hudson's rules constitute a useful model for institutions contemplating compiling or publishing a set of rules, and to borrow a line from the historian Le Roy Ladurie when describing a published Inquisition Register, "it has the great merit of existing".

The index entries to the printed catalogues of the British Library Department of Manuscripts consist of two parts, "headwords", such as name, place or subject, and "body", which amplifies the headword with such details as a location statement, date and short descriptive phrase. The rules provide very considerable scope for adding information to the entries and judging from the catalogue this reviewer consulted, they almost render the descriptions of the additions to the manuscript collection unnecessary. As the indexing is done directly from the manuscripts, there are in fact headwords included in the index which are not mentioned in these descriptions, which explains to some extent why the detail is required. The rules do warn against over-identification "once an ambiguous description has been achieved" but in practice the indexes treat the user extremely well.

Clearly, indexing in the context discussed is the product of assumptions about the typical user (what the user already knows, what access points are required such as name, place, and subject) but assumptions which are weighed against the time and staff one has available to devote to indexing. To take a typical illustration, in the index to the 1977 printed catalogue, covering Additional Manuscripts 4101-5017, only one Descartes appears. Although the full headword is Descartes (Réne), "French philosopher; d. 1650" is added! Yet the Descartes entry also reveals the value of detail, for although the description of the Dr John Pell papers (Add. Mss. 4278-4280) in the catalogue makes no mention of the philosopher, we know from the index that Vol II of the Pell correspondence includes copies of Descartes' letters to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, both in French and English.

The tendency towards excessive detail, evident in the application of Hudson's rules has no direct equivalent, to my knowledge, in Australia. There are nevertheless many examples in the guides to personal papers published by the National Library and the Mitchell Library during the past 5 years of name index entries containing more information than the minimum necessary to identify an author. Given a choice, I suspect our users would prefer less detail, less erudite indexes, and more guides. In this respect, it will be interesting to see what affect the establishment, in September 1981 at the National Library sponsored conference on unpublished Australiana, of an advisory editorial committee has on the index to the *Guide to collections of manuscripts relating to Australia*.

Mention was made earlier of the Appendices, one of which was devoted to manuscripts arrangement. While not directly related to indexing the inclusion of the basic procedures followed by the British Library Department of Manuscripts is most interesting. Two rules in particular

are worth quoting, for reasons which ought to be obvious:

>"1 (i) On accession, preserve existing arrangements only if the archive remains as it was originally created, and this arrangement is satisfactory and has not been disturbed, or if the arrangement represents a well thought-out scheme, properly implemented.
>
>(ii) It may be feasible to retain the general lines of an existing arrangement, while improving it in detail."

and,

>"7.   Most collections of papers may be classified broadly under the three over-lapping categories of correspondence, papers and bound volumes, as follows."

Finding Aids

Susan Woodburn
State Archives of South Australia

Michael Piggott, *A General Guide to the Library Collection and Archives in the Australian War Memorial,* Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1982. 53 pp. Available for $A2.00, plus $0.55 postage from the Sales Section, Australian War Memorial, Anzac Parade, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600.

Phyllis Mander-Jones, comp., *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch),* Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (South Australian Branch) Inc., Adelaide, 1981. 54 pp. Available for $A20.00, or $A16.00 to members, from the Assistant Secretary, R.G.S. of Australia (S.A. Branch), State Library Building, North Terrace, Adelaide, S.A. 5000.

The Australian War Memorial *Guide* constitutes the first published record of the scope and content of the Memorial's large and comprehensive collection of material relating to Australian military history, and the effect of war on the Australian people. Michael Piggott communicates his own excitement about the richness and variety of the material making up the Memorial's collection and its potential as a resource for research in a wide range of disciplines. It provides a detailed resume of the origin, initial purpose and method of accumulation of the collection and notes the unique distinction held by the Australian War Memorial of being "authorised to accept and obtain official records not of its own or its predecessor's making" and its ability under the *Australian War Memorial Act,* 1980, to collect peace time military records, providing a basis for continuing growth and diversity of its holdings.

The method of descriptive listing of the collection used by Piggott itself reflects the varied nature of the material in the Australian War Memorial, being based on record format. Twenty two categories of material are described, a number being artificial extractions from the principal categories of official records and personal papers and others being the various parts of a library or printed reference collection. The descriptive

listing also reflects the largely uncontrolled method of collecting by the Australian War Memorial and the multiple function of the Memorial as a museum and display arena as well as a repository for written and graphic records for research and reference purposes. The level of description of official written records given in Appendix A suggests that documentation of administrative records has been neglected in favour of more exciting private papers and potential exhibition items. There are also indications of loss of intellectual control over many items and collections because of the concentration upon subjects and format. The establishment of a descriptive programme, referred to by Piggott, will hopefully concentrate on series description of official and private records as well as item listing of distinctive format material, particularly if the increased collecting powers given by the *Australian War Memorial Act* are utilised.

The General Information section in the *Guide* provides details of opening times, services and facilities available, access and copying conditions and transport to the Memorial. This section will be especially welcomed by interstate visitors to the Memorial, although such specific details may tend to date the *Guide* before any more comprehensive general description of the collection becomes available.

In contrast to the massive and varied collection of the Australian War Memorial, the manuscript collection of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch, is a very small one, although begun in 1885 when the South Australian Branch of the Society was founded.

One hundred and seventy nine published manuscripts are recorded in the *Catalogue,* meticulously described in classic bibliographic detail by Phyllis Mander-Jones. Her descriptive emphasis generally is very much upon the manuscript item or items created by a particular person and many of the manuscripts listed are single documents, while particular items from a collection of papers are often listed separately on the basis of their format and subject.

Arrangement of the *Catalogue* is alphabetical (principally by author but with subject headings for items without a known author) and this brings together items created by a particular individual. The manuscript emphasis, however, tends to obscure or ignore the claims of provenance and many items which might legitimately be classed as Royal Geographical Society records (even though, as Miss Mander-Jones notes, they were separated from correspondence files at the time of receipt) are separately catalogued under the name of an individual correspondent, while the heading "South Australia" is used to collect together a miscellany of items both about South Australia and created by officials

of the South Australian Government. It is also hard to understand the main entry "New South Wales" for item 113, copies of correspondence with Hovenden Hely concerning the expedition in search of Leichhardt, 1851-1852, when item 144, a photocopy of a letter from John Slater, convict in New South Wales to his wife, Catherine, appears under the name of the author, or the use of the main entry "Germany" for a letter from the Crown Prince of Germany to Dr Schomburgh.

The extensive index (to the *Catalogue,* not to the detailed content of any item or collection) provides alternative entry into the collection by listing the names of authors, recipients and donors of manuscripts as well as indexing the principal subject and geographical names, but it is a long process to piece together the elements of any single collection, or the correspondence of a particular individual, should this be required.

The *Catalogue* is a handsome production which provides not only a record but a celebration of the collection assembled over nearly 100 years by the South Australian collectors. The limited edition (300) and high cost of copy ($20 for the standard edition), however, precludes the *Catalogue* from wide distribution to researchers. As this is one of the intended purposes of the publication, the Society might consider the preparation of an inexpensive typescript of the item descriptions, without the descriptive notes, for wider distribution and as a medium for regular supplements once this edition has been sold.

Promoting the Better Use of Archives in Australia.

Andrew Lemon

Andrew Lemon (ed.), *Promoting the Better Use of Archives in Australia: Papers from the 1981 Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists*. Australian Society of Archivists, Canberra 1981. 278 pp. $12.00.

What an unparalleled opportunity — to review a book edited by oneself, for a journal published by the publisher of the book. So I need hardly dwell on the felicity of the editing, the simple good taste of the layout and presentation, the modest price for such an omnibus of archival wisdom, or the judiciousness of the publisher in bringing such a volume before the public at this time.

Having remarked on all that, there is something to be said for an editor reviewing his own production. After all, he did not write the contents (save only that eloquent introduction), and he is the only person who one can be certain has read the volume in its entirety, if only in pursuit of straying commas.

The origin of this book is explained in its title. Forty-nine speakers provided fifty papers, of varying lengths, all but two of which are included in this volume. This made it a big conference for a small society, and led to the odd remark about Olympic Games. But Moscow may rest easy in its bed. The large number of speakers were needed to give a token indication of the wealth of material in Australia's archives, the uses to which it can be put, and the monumental problems in preserving it. This was a novel approach, as it should be. No two conferences should try to follow the same format. They must stimulate the profession, not massage comfortable preconceptions.

So the tone was set from the opening address by Sir Paul Hasluck. To those archivists who believe that people in public life have no conception of the work of archivists, it may have come as a surprise to learn of Sir Paul's long experience, as he put it, as a user as well as a

maker of archives and as one who played a role in the establishment of
the Commonwealth Archives. Sir Paul observed that early in his career,
he:

> "developed a strong view that any judgment about what is of historical interest is
> only a transitory opinion that might be relevant today and quite false tomorrow. The
> whole documentary record should be kept intact and preserved as far as possible
> in the form in which it was originally created. The research worker's assessment of
> the credibility and the value of a piece of paper requires the examination of the matrix
> in which it was embedded at the time it was formed."

From this point Sir Paul emphasised that archival establishments must
have an administrative integrity, and not be simply institutions for
collecting historical material. He spoke of his attempts to embody those
principles in the work leading to the founding of the Commonwealth
Archives. It followed that he distrusted the principles on which institutions
which "collected" archives operated.

One could hardly have hoped for a more apt opening address, for many
of the areas of discussion and almost heated debate in the rest of the
conference were foreshadowed in this paper.

The conference title speaks of promoting the *better* use of archives.
All archivists know that the actual rate of usage has increased sharply,
and that this coincides with a worsening — perhaps to crisis point — of
the archivist's problems. These problems, put succinctly, are, first, the
conservation problem — the difficulty in preserving material as it ages,
particularly where it at the same time becomes more frequently used;
second, the proliferation of recorded material, on paper and now also in
newer forms such as tape, film and the entrails of computers; third, the
growing areas of professional activity where the archivist sees the need
to participate; and fourth, the problem of getting the money to pay for
it all.

Everywhere there is the cry of lack of funds. Each of the A.S.A.'s
conferences has indulged in some agonising over priorities — the best way
of sailing a tiny budget over an ocean of responsibility. This time, quite
excellent papers by Brian Baldwin, Paul Macpherson and Doreen Wheeler
(purposely contrasting the views of government archivist, research
collection archivist and business archivist) demonstrated what should be
self-evident: that responsibilities differ according to the aims and origins
of the institutions. But nothing is allowed to be as simple as that. Each
of the papers emphasised that there was more than one responsibility, and
that these could conflict. Brian Baldwin pointed out that service by
government Archives to the government, particularly in records

management, can overshadow, the institution's other responsibilities. He said:

> "It seems certain that academic criticism will make itself increasingly heard if the balance of responsibilities is not restored to some extent in favour of research."

His ideal government Archives was "an academic institution with a utilitarian side". It seemed to me, perhaps through the filter of my own convictions, that this was one of the most important points made at the conference.

Doreen Wheeler suggested that the business archivists' responsibilities are less complicated. They have their employers close behind them and so have to keep their purposes close before them. "The need to justify, continually, the existence of Archives" was, as she saw it, one of the three most important aspects of the business archivist's work. So the archivist has to be a publicist, showing his employer the advantages of an Archives not just for efficiency but also for sustaining company morale and public image.

Most government Archives have been timid and slow in learning this lesson from business Archives. There is room for a much more enthusiastic display of the cultural and community benefits of the archivist's work and of the records he helps to preserve. Funds, in short, can be won by more than demonstrated efficiency. The people will less begrudge money for archives work if they can see the purpose. Art galleries, museums and even libraries do this without relying greatly on the dreaded cost-benefit analyses.

There were a number of reminders at this conference that none of the State Archives in this country, nor the Commonwealth Archives, was established by their governments primarily for efficiency or records service reasons. Each Archives grew from an overdue recognition that historical materials were in danger of destruction. Sir Paul Hasluck cited the Western Australian and the Commonwealth Archives cases, in which he played a part, and in which he argued unsuccessfully that a tighter orthodoxy should be imposed from the start. Of the former he says, "It was not done in the way I would like to have seen it done but the force of circumstances made no other decision possible at that time". In the latter, the impetus came from the representations made by Dr C.E.W. Bean "about the need to collect and preserve Australian records and documents relating to the war". Similarly, John Love, in a paper for the conference session "Order or Chaos?" regards George Henderson, Professor of History at the University of Adelaide, as the driving force

behind the establishment of a State historical collection that led to the foundation of the South Australian Archives in 1919.

Sir Paul quite fairly points out that collections founded on such principles are open to the charge of rigging the evidence. But the point is that it was the historical or cultural reasons that induced the various governments to establish these Archives. The archivists appointed over these dominions — perhaps beginning to read the growing literature on the subject from overseas — managed in their own ways and over differing periods of time to convince their governments that Archives and archivists could offer benefits in records efficiency. This was the process, and this is why Ian Pritchard is quite wrong when he says in a panel comment on another session in these papers ("Retain or Destroy?"):

> "whilst satisfying the need to make records available to the public is important, a government archives exists in the first instance to provide an administrative service to government agencies."

The Monster has devoured the forces that spawned it (I refer to the Archives, not to Ian Pritchard).

The question of the relationship between history and historians and archives and archivists was further aired in that "Retain or Destroy?" session, which proved the most emotive of the conference. Ken Smith argued the need for a bold approach to the destruction of records. Let us, he said, reduce subjective judgments in disposal decisions. Archivists should try to define clear grounds on which retention can be justified. He argued that the only impartial grounds were administrative ones, and that properly-considered administrative decisions would preserve all material that deserves to be preserved. "Historical" grounds should be avoided; indeed, he said, "the term itself is meaningless".

It was at this point that the audience showed visible signs of being awake. Ken Smith took as his text the Jenkinson argument that no amount of scholarship or historical experience alone is sufficient to form a proper judgment on retaining records. He then sought to reinforce his argument by the claim that "most archivists . . . are virtually in an 'in-house' situation" — which, translated, means that most Archives are really business Archives, with governments having the same relation to their Archives as corporations have to theirs.

Paul Brunton, speaking from the vantage-point of an archivist in a manuscript collection, gave some moral support to Ken Smith's line by recounting incidents where non-archivists, in using so-called "historical" criteria, had destroyed much of value in private collections before passing the dregs into custody at the Mitchell Library. Hanging over this session

was the spectre of the Archives Office of Tasmania's Betts-noir, the retired public servant John Betts who was employed in October 1914 to rearrange the records of the Lands and Survey Department, "for future reference", which he did with missionary and convoluted zeal to the total confusion of all subsequent researchers. (His story, a splendid moral tale, is retold in this volume by Ian Pearce, and contains at least one ironic pearl seized upon by Pearce: "Working at ten shillings a day, Betts fought his personal battle with the records through the First World War until his death on 10 November 1918".)

All this brought, by arrangement, Professor Roger Joyce of the History Department at La Trobe University, to his feet. Even in print, his comments stand as an impassioned plea for archivists and the users of archivists to co-operate in every possible way — in part for their mutual protection in a not-very-sympathetic world, and in part because, in all reason, they ought to share a respect for "the search for knowledge through retained records of the past". The denigration of "historical worth", in establishing criteria for retaining records, was a dangerous and divisive ploy: "records should be retained for their value; and 'historical' is one of the valid measures of value that must be considered". He went on:

> "As a historian I, too, want records retained in their original form; I too, as a historian, want records in their original context. I do not want Ian Pearce's enthusiastic busybody rearranging material nor deciding for 'idiosyncratic' reasons to destroy all or part of a series."

Roger Joyce's comments are very pertinent. Much of what Ken Smith is tilting against is an unsubstantial foe after all. Before the days of systematic archival management, the usual criterion used in preserving records once they have aged beyond their legal or immediately obvious usefulness, was historical. In practice this led to, at worst, those episodes referred to by Paul Brunton and Ian Pearce. To avoid this, Jenkinson maintained that administrative criteria were much more consistent; but "administrative" must, if it is to have any meaning at all beyond the strictly obvious current office need, incorporate and give due weight to historical considerations.

David Sissons, in an expanded paper for this volume, rings some further changes on this issue. As a researcher thoroughly conversant in the ways of archives and archivists, he concedes that there must be destruction, and that "even under the best devised systems of selection some material of value to some future researcher will be destroyed". But he cannot accept that the Australian Government administration, as he knows it, has the capacity to take a sufficiently broad view of "administrative criteria". As

a result he sees a role for scholars in reviewing destruction recommendations.

Here is a scope for even more argument. The biggest complication is that a case can be mounted for the retention of just about everything. Which historian will be bold enough to cast into oblivion the seaweed sample case cards while considering that it is just possible that the trendy discipline (or, rather, non-structured semester) of the next decade will be seaweed studies? It is fair to say that the central point of Ken Smith's paper was that destruction of records, even on a quite substantial scale, was a major responsibility of archivists, and that to duck that task was in fact to endanger the preservation of the crucial core of records. Burning back, he called it; fighting fire with fire. Even so, it is foolish to take an all or nothing approach when there often are experts who could well be approached for advice in any properly-considered decision about destruction. Merely incanting the magic words "administrative criteria" achieves nothing. Administrators, unaided, are just as likely as historians to make silly decisions, as any archivist can tell you. After all, Betts was a public servant, not a historian.

Lying at the heart of at least some of the confusion is Smith's "in-house" analogy. It is misleading, but it has gone unchallenged in the panel comments for the session. As with the Pritchard view, it sees governments as the ultimate corporations. Cynical or even dedicated employees of the government are apt to acquiesce in this mental slide. In our capitalist system at least, the social obligations of businesses are few. Beyond the requirements of the law, they are not obliged to keep any records at all. If they establish a good Archives they may glow with virtue. But governments are not in the same position. Disregarding metaphysical arguments about power emanating from the Crown, the government is the agency of the people. The people are entitled to demand not just efficiency within the government, but also a due care for cultural considerations and a respect for the records the government creates.

I have gone on at some length on this issue, and necessarily at the expense of many other excellent papers in this volume. But the beauty of the conference was that nebulous theory and debating-points could be tested and put into context by the large number of more specific papers.

The focus of the conference was on the sessions collectively titled "Australia's Archives", divided into four, chronologically. In each, an introductory paper examined something of the nature of archives and the problems of dealing with them. Each of these introductions — all tackled with intelligence and individuality — were excellent starting points for the specific papers that followed. So Anne Robertson set out the daunting

problems that face an institution such as the Mitchell Library (and the Library staff, which is not necessarily the same thing) in trying to care for older records. Douglas Bishop, in a virtuoso piece concerning the period 1839 to 1900, pointed out that the nineteenth century was very much the twentieth, writ small — or perhaps writ large, as in large-print digests. Its archives have so much to say about our present condition at a time when the present proliferation of small print does much to obscure the truth. Elizabeth Nathan, speaking of the period 1901 to 1945, reflected this as she piled upon themselves the bizzare collections of government boards, bureaux, commissions, councils, branches and institutes, like a mountain of trifle topped by her favourite, the Winter Butter Pool. All this creates vast problems for archivists who are meant to eat their way through the mess, and does something to explain why government archives run dangerously close to forgetting that there are potential users. She called for "better and more frequent communications between archivists and those who need to consult archival records". The conference proved her point.

Finally, Anne Green tackled the problem of the post-1945 archives, "the archives in embryo" as she called them. She pointed out forcefully and effectively that in most spheres of activity today, record-keeping systems remained low-grade and ineffective:

> "With greater awareness, greater control, more professional literature being written on the subject, then why don't all our record systems, if they are administered by professionally aware people, work properly?"

The implication of this, she points out, is that in the rising tide of uncontrolled records and information, important records may have less chance, ironically, of surviving.

Many of the supporting papers in these sessions were given by non-archivists. All of them were of interest, some spectacularly so. Each reflected at least two important things. First, there is a wide range of users who can use archives for many different purposes, including the use of "old archives" (that is to say, records that have been well-used in the past) in new and different ways. Second, there is the wonderful enthusiasm engendered in the researcher by the potential and actual discovery of new sources and information in the archives. This enthusiasm was manifest in the papers from the most experienced of researchers to the newest. Since archival search and reference rooms are rarely conducive to displays of jubilation, it must have been a salutary experience for archivists to see something of that jubilation at the conference. The researchers also took the opportunity to unload a number of gripes, ranging from

frustrations on restrictions on photo-copying or access, to the principles embodied in the process of destruction. It was good to see these problems being aired at a conference that gave due weight to the problems experienced on the archivist's side of the counter.

The papers delivered by the archivists in these sessions demonstrated a similarly wide range of approach, and quite frequently a no less enthusiastic attitude to the records in their care, particularly where they felt that these records' potential for yielding information or entertainment had been persistently overlooked by researchers. Frank Upward, from Australian Archives in Melbourne, addressed himself to the problems that users face in finding information from records with elaborate — or, conversely, non-existent-finding aids. His colleague Sue McKemmish gave a paper on providing reference services for post-1945 material, and she elaborated on those points. Government archives devoted some of their time, she said, to documenting their documents, but gave insufficient thought to the ways of reaching out to users with diverging skills and interest. She appealed for greater flexibility in producing finding aids. Importantly she added, "Many of the problems arising in the reference services area cannot be solved without a greater allocation of resources — no matter how efficiently current resources are managed and priorities set".

Again the specific papers illuminated the theoretical discussion in the dilemma session "Order or Chaos?". John Love discussed the evolution of archival practices in the South Australian Archives, and the problem of adapting old systems to new circumstances and theories. Judy Watts suggested some positive steps that can be taken to process the growing amount of materials that arrive at most archival repositories. Michael Hoare, of the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand, in commenting on these papers, suggested that some of the problem of this growth was of the archivist's own seeking. Research archives and manuscripts libraries eschewed co-operation: "Prestige-seeking and archival 'one-upsmanship' often override rational collecting policies", he claimed. He also believed that collecting institutions were not sufficiently selective or professional: "Too often we present ourselves as providing an obsequious service, and get treated accordingly"; and, "we soon become seen as 'archival suckers', convenient storemen".

Perhaps some answers to the order or chaos dilemma emerged in the final session of the conference, "Keeping up to Date". Like the other theoretical sessions, this was presented under the umbrella title of "The Archivist's Dilemma". Technology has the potential, as Christopher Coggin's fascinating paper sets out, to come to the aid of the archivist

if the archivist will answer the challenge. On the other hand, as both he and Peter Scott point out, technology has the corresponding potential to create ever more serious complications. Coggins says, "The proliferation of machine-readable records has in it the potential destruction of vast quantities of data" — another variation of the problem identified earlier in the conference by Anne Green.

Such a bald summary does little justice to the provoking and informed thinking of this volume. I noted that this book, at 274 pages, represents the largest publications produced by the A.S.A. in its seven years of existence. If one adds the 220-page volumes from the 1979 conference, the bigger *Archives and Manuscripts,* sundry *Bulletins* and other A.S.A. publications, one recognizes a verbal explosion in what was previously the almost-silent service in Australia. It is heartening to note that most of the writing is literate, intelligent and attractive, and not weighed down by jargon. This volume, if not taken in huge quantities, will not lead to indigestion. Its importance lies in allowing archivists to take a step back to look at themselves and their work in perspective — as I said, an omnibus of archival wisdom.