

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Colleen Pritchard

Records Management Office of N.S.W. Publications in Records Management, Sydney, No. 7 Records Scheduling and Disposal, January 1982; No. 8 Glossary of Records Management Terms, March 1980; No 9 How to compile a Procedure Manual, May 1980, and Storage and Equipment Information Sheets, December 1976. Available from the Records Management Office of N.S.W., 2 Globe Street, Sydney, N.S.W. 2000.

Records management in Australian institutions is still the exception rather than the rule. In this context the Records Management Office of N.S.W. is one of the longest established practitioners and certainly the most visible. The activities of the R.M.O. include the training of records staff within the N.S.W. Public Service. Its educational role, however, does not end there. Every person working in the field of records management gains from the experience and expertise of the R.M.O. Its publications are an important part of this wider role.¹ For archivists/records managers they provide guidelines on possible directions to be taken and add reinforcement by concrete examples.

The *Glossary of Records Management Terms* clearly defines many words that are all too easy to use freely, often forgetful that to others they are meaningless jargon. This volume is a work of reference available for consultation by those officers left dazed.

The *Glossary* is aimed specifically at the N.S.W. Public Service, so contains references to N.S.W. legislation and authorities. It includes definitions of terms essential to the Keyword method of classification (the single access point indexing system adopted by the R.M.O.). Each of the terms defined specifically for that method is clearly marked as such. The definitions cover terms applicable to registry practice — such as “file movement” and “inwards correspondence register” and terms which relate to the technicalities of records management — for example “appraisal” and “transfer list”. The terms are not prescriptive and even such horrors as “personal filing systems” contain no admonition.

I was introduced to two new concepts through the volume “aspect filing” and “desk numbering”. My one reservation is that I thought the term “disposal” might have spelt out more clearly that the term embraces more

than destruction. The term is explained by examples, but I felt that the definition in the later publication *Records Scheduling and Disposal*, although basically the same, provides greater clarity.

How to Compile a Procedure Manual is just that. It guides departmental officers involved in this activity through the various steps, setting out the advantages of the undertaking, and offers suggestions on how to gather relevant data. A sample questionnaire aimed at establishing work flow and specific duties of staff, is included. The publication also gives political hints, such as having the Manual authorized by the most senior departmental officer.

Records Scheduling and Disposal is the latest R.M.O. publication, although its existence was mentioned as early as 1977. The responsibility for producing disposal schedules for the functional records of a department is placed with departmental staff, and this publication, in conjunction with films and training seminars held by the R.M.O., is a guide to the production of such a schedule. The volume utilizes diagrams to show the advantages of a records disposal programme and the paths to be followed in having a schedule issued are clearly shown. The R.M.O. has devised forms to ease the compilation of such schedules. Both the inventory form, used to gather basic data on series, and the records disposal form are reproduced, with detailed notes on the completion of each. I was rather taken aback at the simplicity of the inventory form for the recording of series detail and as the basis for making disposal recommendations, particularly in regard to complex record series. After some thought, however, I came to the conclusion that the demystification of the dreaded disposal lurgy was all to the good and that the depth of detail needed to accurately complete the form was greater than it initially appears — as no doubt departmental records officers discover.

Storage and Equipment Information Sheets is an early publication of the R.M.O. It is less polished than later publications, its major drawback being a lack of a table of contents. The introduction states its aim — “to provide records officers with up to date information on records systems and associated storage equipment” and “to assist officers in the selection of equipment”. Little information is provided on records systems, and, first published in December 1976, it is now inevitably out of date. Despite these qualifications the volume does not lack relevance.

Methods of storage are examined in detail with both advantages and disadvantages set out. The traditional lateral filing system is evaluated against rotary storage, power storage and compactus. Vertical map and plan storage is evaluated against horizontal storage. Card storage methods are examined, and three random filing systems are briefly surveyed. All are presented with assessments as to cost, space, ease of access and often,

suitable methods of application for various pieces of equipment. An inevitably dated list of suppliers in N.S.W. is provided. Although the publication is dated the evaluations provided on the various storage equipment would be of great use to those purchasing equipment; and the R.M.O.'s opinion as to the most economic use of various storage facilities remains of value.

Although one may rue the economic climate which ceases to enable the distribution of these publications on request, they are still an inexpensive and invaluable addition to the reference shelves of archivists/records managers.

FOOTNOTES

1. For reviews of *Publications on Records Management* Nos. 1 to 6 by Pennie Pemberton see *Archives and Manuscripts*, Volume 8, No.1, June 1980, p. 64-65.

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The Library Council of New South Wales, Guide to papers of John Le Gay Brereton in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, 1981. 23pp. ISBN 0-908-449-13-5 (Mitchell Library Manuscripts Guide, No. 5). Gratis. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000.

John Le Gay Brereton (1871-1933) was born in Sydney. He began contributing to literary magazines during his school days at Sydney Grammar, and at Sydney University he edited the student journal, *Hermes*. On leaving university in 1894, Brereton tried a number of jobs before he was appointed in 1903 to the position of Assistant Librarian of Fisher Library, University of Sydney, and in 1915 was appointed Librarian. During this time he established himself as an Elizabethan scholar of international repute. In 1921 he became the University of Sydney's first Challis Professor of English Literature, a position he occupied until his death.

The earlier *Mitchell Library Manuscript Guides* in the series have been reviewed on previous occasions.¹ The *Guide* to the Brereton papers follows the same format as preceding publications, including a catchy cover illustration which is a self-portrait of Brereton. On the verso of the cover is an anonymous quotation describing Brereton which creates a vivid picture of the man.

There are provenance and biographical notes followed by a catalogue entry which provides a summary of the contents, a detailed contents list, an index to correspondents, catalogue entries for other Brereton papers held by the Mitchell Library but not included in detail in this *Guide*, and a list of pictorial material which is catalogued in the Pictures Section of the Library. The table of contents and construction of the *Guide* makes this publication an easy one for researchers to use.

A point of interest in the provenance note is the mystery of why letters from Dowell O'Reilly to Brereton were removed and exchanged for other letters. The bulk of the papers was received in 1934; however, other material was received until 1981 and no doubt other caches will come to light in the future. This once again illustrates the pattern of acquisition of so many collections of personal papers held by libraries and archives.

The index to correspondents is detailed giving name, date, volume and page numbers. This is an indication to researchers of the amount of material available, which could mean the difference between the expense of an interstate airfare or an application to copy only a few of the letters which may be relevant.

I found it particularly useful for the papers which are the subject of this *Guide* to be placed in the context of related material held by the Mitchell Library. Researchers would be confident of knowing that up to the publication of the *Guide* no further deposits had been made.

It is hoped that the staff of the Mitchell Library can go on publishing guides such as this one and continue their valuable contribution to the documentation of Australian primary sources.

FOOTNOTES

1. M. Medcalf, "Mitchell Library Guides", *Incite*, 17 April 1981, p.11. (Mitchell Library Manuscripts Guide, No.1 and No.2)
2. C. McEwan, "Finding Aids", *Archives and Manuscripts*, Volume 9, No. 1. September 1981, p. 92. (Mitchell Library Manuscripts Guide, No. 3 and No. 4)

Kandy-Jane Henderson,
The J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History, Perth

North Australia Research Unit of the Australian National University.,
Guide to the Northern Territory research resources in Northern Territory collections, Compiled by M.A. Clinch, Darwin, 1981, 374 pp.

Bibliographies, particularly those containing extensive lists of published works and other records not held by archival institutions, can frustrate the prospective researcher because they do not provide sufficient indication of the location of those itemised works. This *Guide to Northern Territory research resources in Northern Territory collections* compiled by Margaret Clinch, BA, Lib., MLS, ALAA attempts to remedy that fault by listing mostly published material in the forms of books, pamphlets, periodical articles, and audiovisual items and some unpublished reports, particularly government reports which relate to a variety of Northern Territory research subjects, and, more importantly, the location of that material.

Apart from the expected foreword, preface, introduction, instructions for use of volume and bibliographies, the *Guide* is in four major sections: A Directory of Collections in the Northern Territory, a Finding List, followed by Appendices and Maps.

The Directory, which covers details of sixty collections of government and non-governmental libraries, provides information on the function and research capacity of those agencies in the following set order —

1. Directory item number
2. Name of the collection
3. Symbol used in Finding List
4. Location of collection
5. Postal address
6. Officer in charge/contact person
7. Telephone number
8. Telex number
9. Hours available
10. Availability of inter-library loans
11. Collection size
12. Percentage of collections catalogued
13. Main subjects included
14. Percentage of total collection related directly to the Northern Territory
15. Additional information.

The Finding List contains about 8,200 entries registered with an alphabetical single number sequence and arranged lexicographically either by author or the key-word of the title of periodical articles, audio-visual material or edited works. Where possible the following details have been provided for each entry —

1. Item number
2. Author/title main heading
3. Title statement
4. Imprint statement
5. Collation statement
6. Series
7. Explanatory note
8. Location/s
9. ISBN number

Detail 8 provides the all-important link between the research material and its location described in the Directory.

Unless the single page introduction to the *Guide* has been memorised, the reader would become confused about the name and intention of the *Guide* when the Finding List is examined. The Finding List actually records items which either relate specifically to the Northern Territory or overlapping natural regions. In addition some items are listed because of implications for the Northern Territory e.g. aborigines and mining. For example, a survey of 250 entries indicates that the majority do not relate specifically to the Northern Territory, which is not necessarily the fault of the compiler of the *Guide* but rather an indication of the lack of published works on the Northern Territory.

Where the Finding List does cause concern is in the choice of research resources and the (sometimes) inconsistent listing of those resources. Memorabilia such as souvenir programmes for the *Adelaide River Show Weekend race programme* 1980 (Entry A169), and the Arts Council of Australia, *A Night of Cossack songs and dances with the Tschika Cossacks: souvenir programme*, 1977 (Entry A359) would not appear to be useful for major research works on the Territory.

The latter criticism is understandable if one is aware of the history and proposed development of the *Guide*. Perhaps this criticism will be considered if the *Guide* is ever revised. Annual reports are dealt with in two different ways, either by reference to the individual reports (e.g. Entries A102-A105 *Aboriginal Loans Commission Annual Report(s)* 1975-76, 1976-77, 1977-78, and 1978-79) or to a collection of reports (e.g. Entry A228 *Alice Springs Tennis Association Inc. Annual Reports* 1979). Other periodical publications suffer similar treatment. That afforded to reports for the Aerial, Geological and Geophysical Survey of Northern Australia (Entry A385) would appear to be the ideal solution (viz. the listing of all published reports under one entry), because this would not only substantially limit the number of entries but also allow the inclusion of other material.

It is also disconcerting to discover that complete sets of periodical publications are not located in a single collection. For example, various

meteorological publications listed in entries A433 and A465 are spread between eleven collections but rarely common to all. This is either an indictment of data collecting for the *Guide* or the acquisition policies of the collections. In either case, it is daunting to the reader and prospective researcher.

The Appendices include —

A. Union List of Northern Territory Newspapers

(1) Northern Territory Collections

(2) Collections outside the Northern Territory

B. Brief Chronology of the Northern Territory

C. List of Government Residents and Administrators of the Northern Territory

D. Chronology of Jurisdictions over the Northern Territory

E. Organisation of the Northern Territory Administration etc., which provide background information to assist users of the *Guide*. Unfortunately the details for the historical appendices have been taken from sources which are not necessarily correct. Any mistakes propagated will be difficult to correct.

The last major section, Maps, contains maps of Northern Territory locations, language groups, and primary industries and directions for collections in Darwin and Alice Springs.

The listing of a significant percentage of items on general subjects and overlapping natural regions confirms a belief that the Northern Territory is not adequately represented in the general range of research publications. The production of this *Guide* will lead, hopefully, to the stimulation of interest into research on the variety of topics covered within the *Guide*. When read in conjunction with the monographs, *Bibliography of the Northern Territory* compiled by C.M. Mills, and the *List of libraries and resource centres in the Northern Territory* compiled by J. Tyson and F. Evans, (available from the Northern Territory Branch of the Library Association of Australia), the *Guide* should improve the access to research material and reduce the frustration of the prospective researcher who is always in need of a starting point.

Although the *Guide* is orientated towards the fostering of research into secondary reference material, archivists in the Northern Territory and those who hold records relating to the Northern Territory should consider this *Guide* as a warning of the future demands on primary reference material and consider the implications for meeting this pressure with diminishing resources.

The North Australian Research Unit and the Northern Territory Government should be congratulated on producing this *Guide*. The latter

organisation which has undertaken to update the *Guide* as needed should be encouraged to place the *Guide* on a Government data base to enable wider and contemporary coverage. Because the *Guide*, which was produced in a limited edition is out of print and stock, the fate of the *Guide* depends on its demand and use. Anyone wishing to obtain a second edition should write to The Librarian, Department of the Chief Minister, P.O. Box 4396, Darwin, N.T., 5794, as that officer is considering the requirement for the *Guide*.

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Modern Public Records, Selection and Access. Report of a Committee appointed by the Lord Chancellor. Chairman, Sir Duncan Wilson. H.M.S.O., Cmnd. 8204, London, March 1981. 275 pp.

Modern Public Records. The Government response to the Report of the Wilson Committee. H.M.S.O., Cmnd 8531, March 1982. 29 pp.

The issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* dated December 1981 carried a paper by Professor Margaret Gowing on the work of the Wilson Committee, of which she was a member.¹ There is accordingly no need to go into all the areas covered by the Wilson Committee or the general tenor of its recommendations. However, since Professor Gowing delivered that paper to the A.C.T. Branch of the Australian Society of Archivists in July 1981, the British Government has produced its response to the Wilson Report, accepting 35 of the Committee's 61 recommendations, rejecting 16 and treating the rest in the way one would expect from a government with good intentions but firmly committed to cutting down the public sector.

The Wilson Committee's terms of reference required it to review the system for selecting records for permanent preservation which was introduced following the Grigg Committee's Report in 1954, and also to look at two other areas in particular: regulation of public access to records and technological changes in format and storage of records. Professor Gowing's article gives an account of the areas examined by the Committee and the range of its recommendations, in all of those areas. Basically, the Wilson Committee regarded Grigg's two-tiered review system as adequate in theory and made a number of suggestions designed to ensure that the theory is put into practice, including better training and salary levels for disposal staff, and a more assertive, forward-looking role for the Public Records Office.

Recommendations such as those can hardly be seen as radical, and the Wilson Report was criticised in some quarters for its failure to propose sweeping reforms. In view of the Government's response published this year, the Committee's non-revolutionary stance seems perfectly justified.

The Government is quite happy with the present non-assertive, non-forward-looking role of the Public Record Office. It will consider reviewing levels of disposal staff and agrees that better training would be a good idea, "considered in the context of training needs generally".

The Government is hardly even apologetic about its rejection of almost all the recommendations which "run counter to its intentions to reduce the size of the civil service . . . and the contribution of the Exchequer to public services". It quite explicitly contradicts the Committee's view that none of its proposals would cost much, and that anyway some increase in resources to ensure an effective records and archives system would be justified.

The recommendations on access to public records were no more radical: there was an attempt to give the Advisory Council on Public Records a watchdog role over restrictions made by departments, coupled with suggestions that information on the types of records withheld should be more easily available to the public and that criteria should be developed to allow special access to approved researchers to particular kinds of restricted records. (The Australian Government's access policy has incorporated the latter two suggestions since about 1971).

The British Government firmly rejected the idea that anyone — even a committee of ex-Privy Councillors on the Advisory Council — should be allowed to examine sensitive departmental records to judge whether their restriction is justified. It softened the blow by assuring us that the Government's aim had always been maximum disclosure and it agreed that the Lord Chancellor (as Minister responsible for the P.R.O.) would look "in greater detail" at departmental applications for extended closure. Some recommendations were approved: the wording of the criterion for restriction of personal information will be changed from "distress and embarrassment" to "distress and danger", and it is agreed in principle that the P.R.O. should have more involvement in access matters.

The blandest response of all is "Noted", given to a number of suggestions which could not reasonably be rejected, but which input involve expenditure or a change in the status quo, such as committing the P.R.O. to participate in arrangements to select and preserve film and photographic records.

It is cheering therefore, although hardly surprising in view of the growth of modern technologies in record-keeping, that unqualified acceptance was given to the proposal that the nucleus of a machine-readable data archives be set up under the aegis of the P.R.O. and that some provisions are to be made to improve arrangements for visual material.

Since the Wilson Committee was not set up merely to approve the status quo with a few desirable or necessary additions, it is assumed that its work in three areas in particular is likely to have some long-term effect.

First, the relevance of the "historical criterion" in disposal sentencing, and the ways in which research needs can be considered and academics consulted. There is probably no solution to the problem of what to keep and what to destroy; no decision will ever please everybody. The Wilson Committee's suggestion, rejected largely on the grounds of economy was that Sector Panels comprising current (not 'eminent') researchers be set up in a number of fields to advise disposal areas on research needs. The dialogue between researchers and archivists or administrators, formalized or unformalized, should at least be instituted.

Second, the need for a consistent and rational policy on access to governmental records, subject to some sort of supra-departmental scrutiny, more frequent review of restrictions and more publicly available information about the types of records restricted. Oddly enough, even without an Archives Act, the Australian Government has a more consistent and less restrictive access policy than the United Kingdom. (If it appears less so to researchers, that is because you can see what you are not getting, in the form of marked and sealed documents!)

Third, the need to try and balance out the administration's wish to reduce its holdings of huge series of inactive case-files and the public requirement not to violate the basic privacy of individuals, against the demonstrable value of the wealth of detailed information in such files to researchers in a number of social disciplines. The Wilson Committee was particularly concerned about the need to preserve some National Health Service clinical record for future statistical and quantitative research.

The major recommendations concerning those three areas were all rejected by the British Government. I cannot say whether the implementation of those recommendations would achieve their stated aims, but I do know that the issues raised are of concern to government archivists everywhere and that they will continue to be discussed as problems. The message of the Government's response to the Wilson Report rings as clearly in Australia as in Britain: Keep on doing more, but learn to do it with less!

FOOTNOTE

1. M. Gowing, "British Modern Public Records: A Vital Raw Material", *Archives and Manuscripts*, Volume 9, No. 1, September 1981, p. 15-27.

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A Documentary History of Australia. Vol. 3. Colonial Australia 1875-1900. Edited by Frank Crowley. Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1980. 645 pp. ISBN 0 17 0054101, ISBN 017 005411 X Paperback.

This volume, the third of a series of documentary volumes under Professor Crowley's editorship, builds on a line of documentary collections which have been a feature of the academic history publishing industry since the 1950s. Not the least interesting part of the volume is the brief historical survey of this development, in acknowledgements. Whereas most documentary collections cover some theme or aspect of Australian history, Crowley's aim is to present a synoptic view.

The criteria for selection of documents are explained very clearly and concisely in the preface. They are chosen to indicate the main aspect of the period, to illustrate the major events, to convey the quality of life, to reflect the main interpretations by historians and to emphasise the distinctive features of Australian life and institutions.

Even in so large a series as this, running to more than 3000 pages, and drawing on so many sources, criticism might be levelled that the surface is still barely scratched. This is inevitable, and one can be thankful that so many "surfaces" have been scratched. The collection lives up to its aim of comprehensiveness as well as providing some light-hearted pieces. The documents differ considerably in their original importance: some were key expressions of contemporary polemic, such as those representing the Maritime Strike of 1890. Some influenced public opinion and policy makers, like Henry George's views on land taxation, and some are descriptive of people and places such as Carbine's win in the Melbourne Cup, and the sinking of the *Gothenburg*. All take one beyond the reconstructions of the period by historians, and give a direct sense of what happened.

How much understanding of the period the documents give, however, is another matter. They are not left to speak for themselves, but have introductions indicating their context and significance. They have also been selected and arranged to parallel a general history of Australia. Even so, much of the point in selecting these particular documents remains implicit, and would require a fair knowledge of the subject to appreciate. The strongly chronological arrangement of the documents does not aid understanding, though some issues are developed by the inclusion of replies to a principal document (for example, an expression of sectarianism in 1875) and some stories (like the Maritime Strike) are partially told by the juxtaposition, or near juxtaposition, of some highlights in the unfolding of events. The index provides extensive references to topics as well as to places and names.

While the source is given at the end of each document, I would have liked to have seen a list of all sources at the end of the volume. It would show

biases in the selection of documents. The reality does not quite live up to the claim on page v for comprehensiveness. The vast bulk come from newspapers and periodicals. Few come from books and pamphlets, official or parliamentary publications. Virtually none come from unprinted, manuscript sources, either from personal records or institutional archives. I find this a strange omission, given that some of the specialised documentary collections published by other historians include manuscript material, and it is abundant in secondary works. Perhaps the omission was determined in part by the need to give a surface coverage to so wide a field.

The book is a pleasure to handle. Even the paperback version is stitched and ample glue has been used on the backing: it is a sturdy product. While I am not particularly excited by documentary collections as a form of history, my principal praise for this volume is that it is a good read.

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