

Book Reviews

Edited by Paul Brunton

Our Heritage. *A directory to archives and manuscript repositories in Australia*, compiled for the Australian Society of Archivists Inc. by Olga White, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Jennifer Nash, ASA Inc. 1983. \$15.00, \$12.00 (members).

This indispensable book has been long in the making. A much enlarged successor to Gerald Fischer's (I would not be earning my keep as a reviewer if I did not point out that his name is misspelt in a number of places) pioneering directories of 1968 and 1969, it has been talked of ever since the Society was formed in 1975 and has been attempted by several. It is, however, to Olga White, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich and Jennifer Nash that our thanks must go for actually producing the volume and for the high standard they have achieved in its compilation.

The *Directory* lists 187 repositories (136 more than in the 1969 directory) and is divided into eight sections — one for each state and territory. Within each section, the repositories are listed alphabetically by name. There is a comprehensive index to repositories at the end of the volume.

I can think of two criteria for judging such a work — how comprehensive is it and how useful is the information supplied about each repository?

The fact that it is difficult to assess how well it measures up on the criterion of comprehensiveness points up the very need for such a volume — we do not really know how many institutions there are that are collecting “archives and manuscripts”.

Certainly, 187 repositories included is no mean feat. And the compilers have made every attempt to seek out all likely candidates. There is a limit to how long you can go on collecting information and I do not think anyone would support the view that to publish with 187 entries was precipitate. Most welcome is the news that it is intended to update the *Directory* and to this end its data base has been computerized.

Having said this, I should record a few surprising omissions which I noticed. It is possible, of course, that these repositories were contacted but refused to be included. The Oxley Library, part of the State Library of Queensland, is not present nor is the Fryer Memorial Library of Australian Literature at the University of Queensland. Although the archives of the Anglican Church in Brisbane is mentioned, its archives in Sydney does not appear.

As far as the other criterion is concerned, the usefulness of the

information supplied, the *Directory* scores very highly indeed. The compilers deserve to be congratulated on the professional way they have gone about collecting the data and the way in which it is presented.

The information given is the same for all repositories. When a repository did not respond to a particular question, this is stated. The following information is recorded: name, location and postal address, officer-in-charge, telephone number, opening hours, officer to whom enquiries should be made, access arrangements, principal categories of records held, finding aids, physical form of records, oral history holdings or programmes, reproduction services available. This seems to me to cover all the essential points required in a guide such as this.

In an attempt to lessen the problem of the wide number of non-standard terms that would be used in answering the question "principal categories of records held", the compilers made a fairly comprehensive listing of record types; for example, business records, church records, records of individuals. Each of these classes has a number of subdivisions; for example, business records — retailing, church records — religious orders, records of individuals — community leaders. The repository only had to tick the appropriate categories.

This method seems to have worked well and the entries achieve a high degree of consistency and clarity. Some repositories have misunderstood the meaning of the various categories of records (or so it seems to me) though these are few. I am intrigued by some other claims. The Religious Sisters of Charity of Australia Archives at Potts Point, Sydney, for example, claim to have records of individuals — entertainment. Is this a collection of material relating to all those singing nuns?

At the end of the volume are separate listings of repositories which hold film archives, sound archives, machine readable records, and oral history collections. This information is useful to have extracted in this way.

I began this review by referring to this book as "indispensable". And so it is. It is indispensable to the researcher who will be alerted to the existence of all sorts of useful material which may have been difficult to discover without such an aid. Perhaps more importantly, though, the book is indispensable to archivists because it enables us all to work in less of a vacuum than we did before. If we take seriously our responsibilities to ensure that all aspects of Australian society are adequately recorded then we need to know what is being collected and by whom. This *Directory* is an excellent first step in giving us this knowledge.

The Society owes the compilers an enormous debt.

Paul Brunton
Mitchell Library, Sydney.

Guidelines on Establishing a Microfilming Programme, (Technical Paper No.3), The Archives Office of New South Wales, 1983.

Microfilming of Records, (Technical Paper No.4), The Archives Office of New South Wales, 1983.

On many occasions and in many places archivists feel the compelling need either to justify their existence and work, or to prove to those unaware or misinformed what a positive force the archival profession is and can be.

The situation where archivists are seen by non-archivists to be "negative" in the sense of appearing to embrace the preservation of records rather than wholeheartedly embracing new technologies without qualification, is, however, still with us. These two publications are proof that archivists are vitally interested in the problems that the modern and ever-increasing accumulation of paper records pose — especially in the controversial area of microfilming.

By those in the micrographics industry, archivists are often viewed as only pointing out the disadvantages of microfilming without acknowledging the advantages. This is especially so when the questions of "standards", "specifications" and "archival microfilm" rear their "ugly" heads.

In addition, the attitude by some records management personnel is that archivists do not really know what they are talking about in the area of microfilming, after all they are interested only in backlog filming and filming of those historical dirty books and old maps!

These two technical papers, Nos. 3 and 4, can be seen as a major positive effort on the part of the Archives Office of NSW to "assist Government agencies and similar bodies" in providing basic information on microfilming.

The first publication, *Guidelines on Establishing a Microfilming Programme* is thirteen pages long in its current form. An interesting departure from a Table of Contents or an Index is the "Checklist", which provides a Table of Contents for the publication and at the same time can be used as a checklist or summary of issues to consider.

The issues dealt with are the following: assessing the requirements; setting up a microfilming unit; preparing documents for microfilming; microfilming; storage of microfilm; looking after microfilm; and the Archives Act.

The layout and information is concise, explicit and straightforward. For a person coming to grips with microfilming for the first time, Technical Paper No.3 should provide a more than adequate introduction and guideline to those involved in considering the options of whether to

microfilm, why to film, and the issues to be taken into account

Technical Paper No.4, *Microfilming of Records*, on the other hand, is designed to provide “background information and suitable guidelines for filming”. The publication stresses, amongst other issues, the importance of having well-planned microfilming systems (a point often missed out by those not experienced); the inevitable link between retention policy and microfilm; and the disparity with the “industry”, emphasising space-saving as the major criterion, where it should not be the only major criterion for choosing to microfilm.

Technical Paper No.4 deals with the following aspects:—

Historical background; reasons for using microfilm; different microforms and principal applications; types of films; selecting reprographic equipment; microfilming programmes; quality control; general guidelines for filming; archival filming; preservation and storage of microfilm; personnel; maintenance facilities; select bibliography; and standards.

One idea for Technical Paper No.4 might be to include diagrams to demonstrate the real dimensions and relative sizes of the various media — 16mm, 35mm, microfiche, jackets, computer output microfilm, etc. It was obvious at two microfilming seminars held during 1982 that many participants were unaware of what the various media looked like, let alone their differences. The oft-asked question, why cannot it all be microfiched, rather than being filmed onto 35mm film, aperture cards, etc., may seem obvious to those of us who know, but to others it is a vital piece of information to have. Perhaps it could be included in the final form of the Technical Paper. Technical Paper No.4 is only a preliminary version.

Plates 1—4 which give suggested layout plans of a reprographic laboratory and perspectives of dry and wet bench areas of a darkroom, and the film inspection and testing area, are reasonable inclusions for those involved to get an idea of how a special microfilm unit could be set up.

Technical Paper No.4, which is 44 pages in length, is a comprehensive guide to the procedures of microfilming and demonstrates to those unacquainted with microfilming that microfilming is a complicated procedure not to be undertaken lightly or without proper forethought and planning.

The inclusion of a select bibliography and a list of standards, both Australian and overseas, add to its comprehensive nature and capacity to include most facets of issues of microfilming.

The main adverse comments on Technical Paper No.4 relate to the layout, with perhaps better editing to break up quite long paragraphs into more manageable and readable segments. However, this may be in hand with the planned final version in the near future.

Both publications were made available in advance by the Archives

Office of NSW for the two seminars organised by the Action Committee on Local Government Records and the Training and Development Unit of the NSW Local Government Association, held on 29th April and 8th July, 1983, entitled "Microfilming of Local Government Records: Issues and Challenges for Senior Officers". It was a bonus for the seminars' organising Committee to be able to present in a positive way two excellent publications issued on microfilming by a prominent archival agency, which, although written primarily for State agencies, will be most relevant to those in Local Government having to deal with the issues of microfilming.

Taken as a duo, Technical Papers 3 and 4 will be an asset to the shelves of Australian archivists, who have only too often had to consult overseas publications. In addition, they will be an asset to all "public offices" in NSW contemplating microfilming programmes, whether those "public offices" be State or Local and an Asset to the profession by stating the archival viewpoint in the area of microfilming in a positive and applicable way.

Janet Howse
The Council of the City of Sydney

Jill Hampson, *Removal of a Records Centre and its Contents: A Case Study*. The Society of Archivists Records Management Group, Occasional Papers 2, 1982.

Judging by her introductory passage, Jill Hampson is well qualified to comment on the relocation of archival material. Between 1977 and 1979 she was employed in three separate jobs each involving a major move. Working first with the British Steel Corporation (BSC), then later the Scottish Regional Records Centre and finally with the Northern and East Midlands Regional Records Centre, over 54,000 cubic feet of records were moved under her supervision.

This brief, matter-of-fact paper has much to offer any archivist or business manager contemplating the re-housing of archival material. Regardless of the amount of records involved, the well laid out format offers step by step instruction for an orderly transfer of material between one storage area and another.

In developing the steps, Ms Hampson has covered two types of relocation; that of the removal of the records to a new complex and the temporary location of records in an overflow storage area. Both have their own peculiar troubles. However, by the use of case studies these problems are outlined to the uninitiated. The case studies are not extensive; however, good use has been made of Appendices to supplement the points made. Nine examples, drawn from the working sheets of various moves, lead the

reader through the various stages of planning, preparation, moving and, finally, re-settlement.

The essence of the paper is PREPARATION. Appendix 1, the "Outline Schedule for Moving...", is the pivot upon which the exercise is taken. Archivists engaged in large organizational moves, whether Government or private, would be well advised to adhere to this scheme. The co-ordination of manpower, equipment, resources and facilities is crucial to the sane transfer of large record holdings. Where control is vested in powers beyond the mere controller of the records, an Outline Schedule is essential.

The second point vital to the smooth transfer of records involves the detailed preparation of an inventory of contents or "Location Inventory". This involves not only the location and checking of holdings but also the minute detailing of special requirements for the collection. Material of a fragile nature or irregularly shaped objects require attention so as not to impede the work flow once the move has commenced. The detailed preparation of material familiarises temporary staff with the holdings. More importantly, the inventory provides a close analysis of the general condition of the collection. How often do archivists have the opportunity to make this assessment with the records in their care?

The paper is conveniently divided into three areas, "pre move", "move" and "post move". Each area is sufficiently detailed to the extent that the novice may seek guidance and reassurance without feeling that all the answers have been met. The author is quick to note that each move has its own problems and idiosyncrasies.

Points worthy of note in these sections include the supervisory role of staff in the move, the need to establish clear guidelines with contractors as to the handling of records and a general assessment of cost factors involved in the relocation of a repository.

The user is not forgotten in all of this. Throughout the paper it is stressed that the essential services of reference and retrieval must be available. To do otherwise would be to destroy the general goodwill developed amongst users and impede the regular transfer of material from departments. It is difficult to agree wholeheartedly with the author on this point. Archivists working in public institutions seldom have the luxury of a free flow of information as attained by Ms Hampson with the BSC records. It is all too rare that public institutions have the opportunity to move into new accommodation without being hobbled by measures that limit the efficient transfer and use of such facilities.

The storage system used by the BSC was simplified to the extreme, with storage consisting of either standard size archives boxes or bundles of plans. Control and retrieval was by means of a Shelf Location Number, beginning at 1 and proceeding *ad infinitum*. It is not a criticism of the BSC

or the author in pointing out this system; however, it does show up a weakness in the paper. Many archivists in long established repositories would recognise that their holdings do not come within a hair's breadth of the BSC system. In reality they face a diversity of storage systems. The diversity and nature of the records creates problems in handling, movement, temporary storage and final location when a major move is undertaken. The author has not neglected problems created by irregularly shaped material; however, the impression exists that these were not of any great consequence. In her defence, however, the point still remains: proper planning and procedures should alleviate most difficulties.

A notable absence in the paper concerns conservation procedures, more particularly the fumigation of records coming into new, hopefully uncontaminated, storage. It may be viewed as a minor criticism if the records are known to be free of contamination; however, in a general paper of this nature, room exists for this consideration to be added. This point bears merit when temporary storage is considered. The risk of contamination increases with added incidence of handling.

The role of publicity and the monitoring of the system were seen as necessary to the smooth return of the repository to normal conditions. Publicity is equally vital in the pre move period if the least inconvenience is to be caused to the user. It is also an opportune time to instigate reforms to the old system if necessary. Fresh surroundings help diffuse traditional opposition from the staff and user.

Jill Hampson has provided an ample guide for the archivist, records manager or business manager who faces the daunting task of planning and executing a repository move. Any person charged with this responsibility would benefit by reading this paper.

Ron Gilchrist
Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Dear Robertson: *Letters to an Australian Publisher*, edited by A.W. Barker, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1982. \$19.95

In 1932 George Robertson, one of the founders of the Sydney publishing firm of Angus & Robertson, made arrangements with the Mitchell Library to ensure the preservation in that repository of the records of his firm extending over a period of more than forty years from the time of its foundation in 1886. In 1977, with the assistance of a special grant from the New South Wales Government, the Library acquired a further substantial addition to the Angus & Robertson archive for the period 1932-1970. These two far-sighted arrangements, George Robertson's own and the later generous support provided by the government to allow the

Mitchell to consolidate its holdings, ensured the survival of a body of records of unique interest and importance to the social and cultural history of Australia.

For the years from 1895 (when publishing commenced) until at least the 1950's, the firm of Angus & Robertson bestrode the world of Australian publishing like a colossus. In a period which saw the bold flowering of Australian nationalism, Angus & Robertson held sway as the quintessential Australian publishing house, offering the means by which Australian authors could write and publish in their own country for their own people. Without question, the best of these years was presided over by English-born George Robertson who, with a strong faith in the future of Australian books and Australian publishing made a remarkable contribution to the cultural history of his adopted country.

It is to the period of Robertson's personal dominance within the firm that A.W. Barker has gone to prepare for publication a selection of letters to George Robertson from the cross-section of some of the best-known literary names this country has produced: A.B. Paterson; Henry Lawson; C.J. Dennis; Hugh McCrae; Norman Lindsay; Miles Franklin; Mary Gilmore; and Katharine Susannah Prichard, to name a few. It must be said at once that Barker did not set out to write a history of the firm he himself once worked for, nor was it his intention to write a biography of George Robertson. And yet, in a sense he has done both though he is the first to admit that in neither case is his treatment sufficient.

His plan as editor evolved as he developed a greater familiarity with the records. When he began work, Barker had made for himself a list of important authors with the intention that he would select for publication a representative number of letters from the files of each. This plan did not work: for various reasons the correspondence was uneven and in any case not necessarily representative of all the writers in the Angus & Robertson list. Sydney writers presumably did much of their business in person and, as Barker remarks in his preface, this tended to load the correspondence in favour of the distant author. In the end, he decided to go through the files from A to Z 'selecting any letter that seemed especially revealing of the author-publisher relationship or of an author's character or personal life, or that threw light on some obscure area of Australian literary history, or that was just interesting or amusing in itself, no matter who the author was.' From the narrow point of view of archival orthodoxy, professional custodians of records may frown on this 'one man's personal choice', this scrapbook which offers a selection of highlights of the interaction between author and publisher. It is true of course that Barker has lifted his selections from the sure context of their place within the larger archival series but in doing so he has invariably supplied the principal letters on any subject between Robertson and a selected author, together with other

relevant letters. Throughout the book, Barker carries an excellent linking narrative which provides a clear, precise statement of the particular circumstances which inspired each exchange of letters as well as offering a broad overview of Angus & Robertson's history over the entire period covered by the selected correspondence. Archivists reading these letters may wish that the editor had offered a more certain means for the retrieval of individual letters within the record group itself, particularly since he has imposed a broad chronological framework on his presentation. Archivists will probably feel that in his preface to the collection and in his brief note on sources at the back of the book, Barker has given too little detail about the state of the records themselves, their arrangement and any finding aids which may be available to facilitate access.

Barker's book however is intended for the lay reader, albeit one would guess, a reasonably well-informed and discerning readership. It is a book which will give very substantial delight and pleasure to those who care about our national literature and who are interested in the forces which have shaped and influenced its development. In the period before the more widespread availability of grants of money to aid writers, Robertson's personal generosity in assisting struggling authors is one of the major revelations of the book.

To complement his text Barker has selected a splendid series of photographs of George Robertson, his colleagues in the firm and of the various authors referred to throughout the book. Amongst the best of these is the study of Robertson with T.E.G. Smith of the New South Wales Bookstall Co. photographed in 1924 during the Booksellers' Association Conference in Sydney and the portraits of Zora Cross and Ion L. Idriess. The majority of these photographs come from the Mitchell Library, a point which serves to remind us again and with gratitude of the outstanding research collection which has been painstakingly assembled within this repository as the heritage of the Australian people.

Dear Robertson has been handsomely produced by Angus & Robertson and stands as a tribute by the present-day firm to its own founding fathers. At \$19.95 the book offers very good value indeed. As a contribution to the history of literature and of publishing in Australia it breaks new ground, indicating as it does the potential for research in this area given the wealth of surviving archival material.

John Thompson
National Library of Australia

Tracing Your Ancestors: A Guide to Genealogical Sources in the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History, compiled by the staff of the Library, Perth, Library Board of WA, 1983. \$3.00

Family history research is now extremely fashionable. Whatever may have sparked off the explosion, the fashion is here and has become a fact of life up with which all institutions of historical documentation simply have to put. The West Australians have tried to cope with some of the resulting professional problems in this small book and one can only hope that their energy and initiative will be rewarded. If the potential customers read it — and this is, unfortunately, by no means a certainty at nearly 10 cents a page — it might help to lighten a little of the load by making them informed, rather than completely uninformed, before they start work.

Eight of the chapters outline the holdings of the Library under the headings of indexes and catalogues, published sources, private archives, government archives, newspapers, oral history, photographs and films, and maps. The location of the Library and its hours of opening are described in an introduction which also lists some of the standard published handbooks of genealogical method. It is followed by an opening chapter entitled 'How to Begin' which offers the tyro useful advice such as the basic rule of starting with yourself. The concluding chapter lists some of the non-West Australian genealogical sources held by the Library.

The descriptions are generally adequate in the area devoted to archives but there are some inadequacies in the description of published sources. The entries for electoral rolls on pp 14 and 20 for instance badly need some sort of general statement about the various changes in the franchise and the differences, if any, between the federal and state rolls.

Even so, this is the sort of useful introductory handbook which everybody facing a new historical repository needs. One hopes that it does what it is clearly intended to do and gives the staff a little more time to devote to some of the many other tasks needing attention in every research library.

H.J. Gibbney
Australian Dictionary of Biography