

# The 35th Year of the Australian Joint Copying Project

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*The 1982-83 official annual report of the Australian Joint Copying Project has been amended and slightly expanded in order to give readers an insight into one year's activities.*

In April 1981 the Review of Commonwealth Government Functions Committee recommended severe reductions in the staff of the Australian High Commission in London. Among the proposed victims were the two officers who worked full-time for the Australian Joint Copying Project. In the months that followed most of the activities of the Project had to be curtailed, while in Australia archivists, librarians and historians urged the Government to reject this proposal of the 'Razor Gang'. After a long period of uncertainty, a reprieve was announced and the A.J.C.P. was able to resume the task which it had been carrying out continuously since 1948.

In view of the threatened dissolution of the A.J.C.P. in 1981, it is satisfying to report that the Project has regained its momentum. In fact, 1982/83 was an exceptionally productive year. On the searching side, some useful classes were examined at the Public Record Office, while collections were listed at two of the national libraries, several county record offices and university libraries, and some distinguished learned societies. On the filming side, a total of 365 reels were produced, comprising 199 reels in the Public Record Office Series and 166 reels in the Miscellaneous Series. This was possibly a record figure, as the Project has always aimed at about 200 reels a year. There was also a fairly good balance between the different categories of records filmed — political, legal, military, convict, emigrant, shipping, missionary and scientific.

At the Public Record Office, where records are now open to 1953, the A.J.C.P. has moved decisively into the twentieth century. Most of the classes searched or filmed during the year contained relatively modern records. They included Admiralty papers, dealing particularly with Australian defence in the inter-war years (Adm. 116), despatches and papers concerning the involvement of the Dominions in World War I (C.O. 616), Dominions Office Confidential Prints (D.O. 114), and private

correspondence and records of meetings held at the Dominions Office, 1924-51 (D.O. 121). Another major class which has been searched is F.O. 800, which consists of the personal papers of several Foreign Secretaries, such as Sir Edward Grey, Lord Curzon, Sir Austen Chamberlain, Lord Halifax and Ernest Bevin. Despite the emphasis on modern records, many earlier classes still await searching. Work has been done on the records of convicts, (P. Com. 2) and of naval courts martial, 1789-1839 (Adm. 1), on the musters of Royal Artillery units serving in Australasia, 1846-70 (W.O. 10), and the papers of Lord Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1866-67 and 1874-78 (P.R.O. 30/6).

The Public Record Office remains by far the largest supplier of film to the A.J.C.P. and consequently its policies and services impinge heavily on the work of the Project. Relations with the Public Record Office are generally good. Nevertheless, two developments have created problems for the Project. Firstly, for reasons that are not altogether clear, Public Record Office prices have risen far higher than those of any other repository, with one reel costing as much as £200. Such prices have deterred the Project from filming some large Colonial Office and Dominions Office classes. Secondly, the Public Record Office has increasingly placed restrictions on filming small selections of documents extracted from volumes or bundles. In some cases, such as the in-letters of the Navy Board, 1770-1832 (Adm. 106), it has refused to undertake filming at all. The effect, presumably unintended, of this policy is to favour the filming of modern files in preference to the older records, which are seldom arranged on a subject basis.

During 1982/83 the A.J.C.P. staff spent less time at the Public Record Office than at other repositories. The private collections searched and filmed varied greatly, ranging from the entire archives of the Port Line (a subsidiary of the Cunard Steam-Ship Company) to small groups of letters of emigrants. Among the collections filmed were records of the Fairbridge Society, minutes and ledgers of the Australasian United Steam Navigation Company, correspondence and observation books of the Royal Astronomical Society, records of appeal cases heard by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, archives and manuscripts of the Royal Commonwealth Society, and papers of the statesman Lord Aberdeen, the geologist Sir Roderick Murchison, and the constitutional authority A. Berriedale Keith. Priority continued to be given to London repositories, but a lengthy visit was made to the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth, the last of the four national libraries in the British Isles to be covered by the Project. It is especially strong in church records, political papers and letters and diaries of Welsh emigrants. Other visits were made to the Kent County Archives, which was found to hold an exceptional number of Australian collections, and to the newly-established Merseyside County Archives and the Tyne and Wear Archives, which have shipping and engineering records of Australian relevance.

The Project is fortunate in being able to utilise a number of surveys of Australian and Pacific records in Britain which archivists and historians have made over the last sixty years. In particular, it continues to exploit the work that the indefatigable Phyllis Mander-Jones carried out between 1958 and 1970. *Manuscripts in the British Isles relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* is the Bible of the A.J.C.P. and it has provided the basis for most of its long-term priorities and much of its short-term planning. Inevitably, however, some limitations have become apparent with the passage of time. Since 1972 major Australian collections have been acquired, new record offices have been set up, old archive services have been reorganised, and the records of companies, learned societies and other private organisations have become more accesible. It is inconceivable that all the records described by Mander-Jones will ever be copied. Yet gradually the Project is covering a large proportion of the more substantial collections and it is increasingly turning its attention to lesser-known material which had not been located in earlier surveys.

The form and detail of the entries in 'Mander-Jones' vary greatly. It cannot be assumed, except with the very small repositories, that all the relevant records have been identified and described. Filming must usually be preceded by further searching and more detailed listing. For instance, the papers of W.E. Gladstone and the records of the Royal Society both required an inordinate amount of work before any filming could be undertaken. Gladstone, who between 1868 and 1894 was four times Prime Minister, was a prolific writer and an assiduous hoarder of papers from his schooldays until his death at the age of 88. His papers, which are now in the British Library, take up nearly 800 volumes and form what is probably the largest collection of nineteenth century personal papers in Britain. The first reference to Australia in the papers dates from 1835, the last from 1898. Gladstone's interest in Australia fluctuated, but there are hundreds of letters and other papers about Australian governments, constitutions, ecclesiastical organisation, banking, defence, convicts and foreign relations. Many of the Australian papers can be identified from the index of correspondents in the published British Library catalogue. Consequently, the entry for the Gladstone Papers in 'Mander-Jones' is relatively detailed, extending to 16 pages. Yet other papers were written by obscure Australians or, more commonly, by British politicians, officials, bishops and other individuals. They can only be discovered by scanning each letter or paper. In the end, about 550 volumes were examined closely. The results, embodied in an 85 page list, were rewarding, but it was not a task which many private researchers could ever undertake.

In contrast to the Gladstone Papers, the records of the Royal Society were described in very general terms in 'Mander-Jones'. Thus it was necessary to search in detail through most of its archives and collections of personal papers, although at least the seventeenth century records could safely be ignored. The Australian records of the Society extend over two

centuries, from the first great voyage of Cook in 1768-71 to the death of Lord Florey in 1967. While not complete, the archives of the Society are very extensive and include minute books, correspondence, letterbooks, manuscripts, referees' reports and astronomical and meteorological records. There are also some important collections of papers of leading scientists, such as Sir Edward Sabine, Sir John Herschel, Sir Henry Dale and Florey. The archives is well arranged and a card catalogue contains entries for a large proportion of the records. Checking 75 drawers of cards was itself time-consuming, but there was still the problem of recognising the more obscure Australian correspondents or tracing the Australian references in the writings of British scientists. It was therefore necessary to look at most of the records and manuscripts and not simply rely on the finding-aids; even then, there was still the difficulty of recognising Australian botanical and zoological terms. The lengthy lists of Australian records that were produced underline the pre-eminence of the Royal Society among learned societies and the breadth of its interests and activities.

The work of searching at the British Library and the Royal Society was greatly helped by the promptness with which documents were produced. This was true of most of the repositories that were visited, two of which even allowed the A.J.C.P. searcher the privilege of self-service. Unfortunately, filming orders were seldom handled with comparable speed. Some collections were filmed by the A.J.C.P. staff. Using a portable camera, they had little difficulty in producing at least five or six reels in a week. Commercial photographers were occasionally engaged and their output was somewhat greater. However, most of the larger institutions insisted on the filming being carried out by their own photographers. They could seldom supply a single reel in less than six months and they often took much longer. It is apparent that many British and Irish repositories do not have the staff or the equipment to produce large quantities of high-quality microfilm, and yet they are reluctant to make any use of commercial photographers. Some delays in filming, especially at county record offices, have been caused by the necessity to obtain the approval of depositors. A more serious problem has been the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of tracing hundreds of copyright-owners. Observance of the Copyright Act varies greatly, but most of the larger libraries refuse to copy manuscripts less than 100 years old unless copyright clearance has been obtained. Thus the filming of some major collections of Australian papers will probably be delayed for many years. For example, none of the collections at the Liddell Hart Military Archives at King's College, London, can at present be copied.

During the year, 344 reels of negative microfilm were despatched to the National Library. The cumbersome practice whereby positive copies were produced and distributed from London to the partners in the Project was abandoned in 1980. The National Library is now responsible for

publicising the film and for supplying copies to libraries and archives in Australia and New Zealand.

From time to time the more astute Australian historians undertaking research in Britain visit the A.J.C.P. Office in Australia House to consult the search lists and to check on what is currently being filmed. Collaboration between the Project and historians has been greatly assisted by the establishment of the Australian Studies Centre within the University of London. As the main meeting-place for Australian historians in London, the Centre has already made more researchers aware of the work of the A.J.C.P. and it has also directed the Project to some Australian records in private possession. Another interesting development has been the much closer association between the A.J.C.P. and the scattering of people in London engaged on similar projects. The long-established Canadian project has expanded its activities, the Kenyan National Archives has been surveying and filming records in Britain for several years, and recently Zimbabwe, Ghana and other African countries have taken steps to set up copying projects. Regular meetings of the archivists involved in these ventures have been held, and have been a useful means of exchanging information about records, repositories and the technical aspects of microfilming.

There is very little correlation between the amount of work undertaken by the A.J.C.P. staff and the quantity of microfilm that is ultimately produced. Some large archives, such as the Port Line records at Liverpool University, have been filmed promptly without any fuss. With other collections, weeks of searching and years of negotiations, reminders and cajolery are required before two or three reels are eventually acquired. There was a large element of luck in the exceptional output of 1982/83. Nevertheless, the research value of many of the collections searched or filmed is incontestable and vindicates the efforts of those who helped to save the Project in 1981.

For earlier reports of the progress of the A.J.C.P. see Graeme Powell, 'The Operation of the Australian Joint Copying Project', *Archives and Manuscripts*, Vol.4 (May 1972) pp.4-16; John Thompson, 'The Australian Joint Copying Project: Thirty Years On', *Australian Library Journal*, Vol.28 (19 October 1979) pp.334-37.