

# Periodical Fits of Morality

Robert Sharman

## Introduction

Lord Macaulay is reported to have said that he knew no spectacle quite so ridiculous as the British public in one of its periodical fits of morality<sup>1</sup>. This could also be said, with even greater force, of the editors of journals, and perhaps more tellingly so of the editors of daily newspapers. The leading article affords many a sanctimonious prig the opportunity to strut and posture, flaunting his (or her?) new-found (and soon-to-be-lost) virtue before a suitably cowed and rebuked public. My own period of editorship of *Archives and Manuscripts* gave me many an opportunity to lecture my colleagues, and demonstrate the kind of superior devotion to high archival principles that one would expect from Sir Hilary Jenkinson.

The things that can be said about my work of editing *Archives and Manuscripts* might have been taken from what Charles Lamb said about the borrowers of books — ‘those mutilators of collections, spoilers of the symmetry of shelves, and creators of odd volumes’.<sup>2</sup> Certainly as I now look at a collection of the issues of the journal produced under my editorship I am struck by the fact that some very odd volumes were created, and no-one arranging the issues in his mahogany bookcase would be at all impressed by the symmetry of the contents.

## Asymmetrical editorship

My period of editorship covered a little over fifteen years — from August 1960 until November 1975, and during this period 39 issues of the journal were produced. Nine of the years of my service for the journal were spent in Queensland (1960-69), two in the Australian Capital Territory (1970-71) and four in South Australia (1972-75). Thus the editorial address moved with me across Australia, and had I agreed to continue to edit the journal in the late 1970s I would probably have created some sort of record, as in 1976 I became State Librarian of Western Australia.

Memories of that long drawn-out period of editorship are now a little vague, except that I know that it was a struggle to get issues published because so few articles reached me unsolicited, and some correspondents had to be practically dragooned into writing for the journal.

Throughout the period *Archives and Manuscripts* was the official organ of the Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia, and it became possible to launch into letter-press print only because the parent Association made a grant to the Section large enough to enable the editor to commission a printer. Curiously enough, it was just when money became available to print the journal that the largest hiatus occurred between issues



Ted Schellenberg (seated) and Bob Sharman (standing) 1954.

— volume 2, number 5 (the first printed issue) appeared in June 1963, and it was not until April of the next year that volume 2, number 6, appeared. Thereafter the frequency and regularity of the journal was reasonably well established. Issues were produced in November 1964, and in May and November of each year from 1965 to 1971. Thereafter, registration for

transmission by post as a periodical (with its concomitant reduction in postal rates) was available only to journals produced once a quarter, or more often. Therefore the journal increased its periodicity (as they say) and was produced in February, May, August and November from 1972 until I ceased to be editor in 1975.

### Printers

Though the original cyclostyle format, on quarto size paper, was awkward and unattractive, its use did enable the editor to maintain a firmer control over the production, and to maintain stocks of back issues. I discovered to my cost, on a later occasion, that printers are a law unto themselves, and paid little heed to the instructions of the publisher. When the journal first went into letterpress, I was in Brisbane, and commissioned a firm called Shipping Newspapers, of Bowen Street, Brisbane, to print the journal. This was probably the most satisfactory of all arrangements, for my contact at Ship News Print, as they called themselves, was keen to collaborate, and usually managed to meet all his undertakings respecting the availability of galley proofs and page proofs. The printer accepted an obligation to carry out proof-reading (though I always read the proofs again, as a double check) and had to confess that much of what an archival journal published was powerfully soporific stuff. I remember, therefore, one occasion when my Ship News friend came to me with a glint in his eye, and commented how interesting the latest issue had been to proof-read. I was puzzled, until I remembered that the issue contained an article written (like so much of that early material) by the editor himself, giving details, from original material in Queensland State Archives, of sexual misconduct amongst the steerage passengers and crew on board an immigrant ship the *City of Brisbane* which had arrived at its namesake port one hundred and four years earlier.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1960s, Queensland was recognised as a particularly Puritan state, with strict censorship. If any reader wanted to indulge an interest in prurience, he could scarcely expect to find much to gratify his tastes in the bookstalls of that State — even *Playboy* was banned. Queensland censors had minds capable of identifying a plot against the prevailing morality almost anywhere, but one doubts if even the most imaginative of censors would have bothered to read a staid journal like *Archives and Manuscripts*. On reflection, it might have been a good idea to have flaunted my taste in the publication of sexually explicit material from the Queensland State Archives (there was plenty of it there) — *Archives and Manuscripts* may well have become a best-seller in the southern States, if nowhere else, and perhaps I could have conducted my editorial work from the fastness of Boggo Road Prison!

Prisons seem to have played a larger role in the history of *Archives and Manuscripts* than one might expect. At one stage in my period as editor, Allan Horton, University Librarian of the University of New South Wales, suggested that a cheaper method of getting the journal printed was through

the printing workshop at Long Bay Gaol, in New South Wales. Allan had been a former joint editor, with Phyllis Mander-Jones, of the journal, and certainly had the interests of the publication at heart. It appeared that a large amount of money could be saved. I no longer have a record of the amounts of money involved, but the Long Bay Gaol could have done the job at a fraction of the cost. I was still somewhat doubtful, however, for I did not want to see the quality of the job deteriorate. I wrote and asked for a sample of their work, and received an indignant response from the superintendent of the printery. Her Majesty's Industries, I was told, do not deign to give an example of their work!

At the time, the executive officers of the Archives Section were resident in Western Australia. Our President was Miss Mollie Lukis, Archivist of the J.S. Battye Library of West Australian History; Mike Andrews, the Accountant and Administrative Officer of the Library Board of Western Australia, was auditor of our accounts. I remember being told with what glee Mike had heard the story about Her Majesty's Industries' professional pride being hurt by any suggestion of samples being required. I resented Mike's glee more than Long Bay's pride, and was determined one day to wreak my vengeance upon him. In 1976 my opportunity came, at long last, to repay him for exuberant mirth at my expense. I became State Librarian of Western Australia. I am still working out the precise form of my revenge.

### **Editorial Policy**

Put very simply, the editorial policy I followed was to publish just about anything that was offering. I did at times reject articles as being outside the scope of the journal, but a great deal of my time was spent in trying to cajole archivists, historians and manuscript librarians to write for me. We offered no payment but the honour and glory of being in print.

The constituency upon whom I had to draw was quite small, as almost the only institutions in Australia ready to support an archives journal conducted by a sub-group of a library association were the State archives institutions, and of those the Victorian State Archives (now the Public Record Office) was almost invariably unco-operative. Jim Gibbney, a member of the Commonwealth Archives Office staff (now the Australian Archives) was supportive, both during the days of his membership of the Commonwealth Public Service, and later when he had escaped to the more congenial (for him) atmosphere of the Australian Dictionary of Biography Unit at the Australian National University. Jim was almost the only member of the Commonwealth Archives staff who gave that kind of support. For most of them, the very suggestion that they could support a manifestation of the administrative link between archives and libraries (wherein the former was, of course, subordinate to the latter) was greeted with horror.

I don't think I was ever threatened with a defamation suit while I was

editor, but I must confess to having raised the ire of one or two of my colleagues in the archives world and, more particularly, in the library profession. This sort of thing almost always occurred when editorial material was very hard to come by, and I was forced into writing controversial material myself, or into cajoling some of my historian friends into writing something. For historians are not altogether in awe of librarians, and sometimes fail to pay them that homage that the keepers of our great library institutions seem to expect.

My late friend Roger Joyce, then a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Queensland, obliged me by writing an article<sup>4</sup> for one of the early issues of *Archives and Manuscripts* on the tribulations and the triumphs he experienced in pursuing research into the life of a colonial administrator, Sir William MacGregor. Roger made it quite clear that he had written at my insistence, which almost made it look as if I shared some responsibility for what he wrote. ('I have now fulfilled' — he wrote at the end of the article — 'my promise to your editor to fill a few pages') and his criticism of the Mitchell Library's less efficient service (less efficient, that is, to Roger's mind, than the British Museum) seemed to cause major offence in the library world, to which we had to look for support. It may have been better had I not published in that same issue of *Archives and Manuscripts* an article in which some rather smart remarks were made about methods of arranging and describing maps in the Mitchell Library. It would certainly have been preferable if the author of that condescendingly paternalistic article had not been myself.<sup>5</sup>

Gordon Richardson, then Principal Librarian of the State Library of New South Wales, of which the Mitchell Library is a constituent part, was at the time President of the Archives Section and so the titular head of the organisation responsible for *Archives and Manuscripts*. A man of few words, he told me quite succinctly of his displeasure at both Roger's and my articles, and left the matter there.

The journal was not aligned either one way or the other in the major controversy that characterised library/archival relations in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of my colleagues felt rather keenly about the need for archives institutions to have independence from libraries, and I certainly would not have rejected for publication any article which advocated that cause. Indeed, in one rather outspoken article, I welcomed the creation of a separate archives institution (the Public Record Office) in Victoria, which thus achieved independence from the State Library of Victoria, with a title that proclaimed my own loyalties.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, a rather delicate balance existed between the advocates of library control of archives, and those opposed to it, and by and large it was those who owed allegiance to library institutions, rather than those opposed, who could be relied upon to write for me.

### **Fifteen years hard labour**

In my Queensland days I was fortunate to have two clerical workers, Beris Carkeet and Barbara Guy, who assisted me in countless different ways with the editorial preparation, the reading of proofs, the conduct of editorial correspondence with prospective contributors and (when charges had to be levied to offset, to a very minor extent, the cost of printing) the collection of subscriptions. In my later positions, as Archives Officer of the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, and as Assistant State Librarian of the State Library of South Australia, I had no such assistance. In addition, the editorial work for an archival journal seemed scarcely relevant to an assistant State Librarian, specially as my duties in that office did not extend to a responsibility for administering the archives. I had to do almost all of the work myself.

Therefore for about the second half of my career as editor I was also production manager, subscriptions officer, accountant and office secretary. I did all the work connected with *Archives and Manuscripts* at home, and turned a small cottage my wife and I had on the property at Snows Road, Stirling, South Australia into the office of the journal. At evenings and at weekends I kept the subscription records up to date, typed out invoices, prepared copy for the printer, addressed envelopes, and bundled up three or four hundred copies of each issue for lodgement at the General Post Office next Monday. I had my own method of proof-reading, based upon the use of what was then the latest technology. I would read the text of each article on to a magnetic tape on a reel-to-reel tape recorder which I had bought (primarily for use of my teenage son, who dubbed the latest rock tunes on it, and played them back to himself, and to most of the neighbourhood, at all hours of night and day). Having read the article on to the tape, reading from the typescript, I then played it back to myself, while I checked the accuracy of the typesetting from the proof. It was laborious, but when the job was done I could blame no-one but myself for any errors which had gone undetected.

### **Achievements and disappointments**

I have often wondered why I retained that unpaid office for so many years. Looking back, I can recognise that there were a few really worthwhile articles published in the time I was editor, but also a great deal that should never have seen the light of day. I often note with pride that when articles are written about copyright in manuscripts left unpublished at the death of an author, Professor Geoffrey Sawyer's articles<sup>7</sup> in *Archives and Manuscripts* are frequently quoted. Graeme Powell's very important work tracing the history of the Joint Copying Project<sup>8</sup> was one of the coups. Gerald Lynn Fischer, sometime Archivist in the South Australian Archives, and later Archivist of the University of Sydney, wrote some very good material. His style always impressed me, and his scholarship was first rate.

Scanning the lists of contents, one can just about trace the itineration of your editor through the different parts of Australia, by the evidence presented by the changing *dramatis personae* of the authors. Surely the editor must have lived in Queensland to have enveigled such authors as the Rev. Principal G. Lindsay Lockley, of Cromwell College, Brisbane, to write about Congregational Archival material in Australia<sup>9</sup>! The two years I spent at the Australian National University in Canberra are reflected in tables of contents for the greater part of volume 4. There was an article by J.F. Atchison on the Archives of the Australian Agricultural Company (Atchison was a Ph.D student at the School of General Studies, ANU), the second of the articles by Geoffrey Sawer mentioned earlier, material by Dr J. Hagan on W.E. Murphy's manuscripts, and a perceptive discussion about archival training by Michael Piggott, now of the Australian War Memorial.<sup>10</sup>

To some extent, the journal tried to cover events in the archival world across the Tasman Sea, although it did not ever claim to be the official organ for New Zealand archivists. Such a claim would have caused a lot of resentment in that country. It was always my aim, however, to gather some news from New Zealand, and to an extent *Archives and Manuscripts* filled a gap until the appearance of *Archifacts*, the journal of the Archives and Records Association of that country.

No history of the period of my editorship would be complete without some mention of Janet Hine's excellent work in compiling indexes. Needless to say, Janet was unpaid, and carried out her work with meticulous care. It is a tribute to her work that the writing of this article has not in the slightest been delayed by an inability to locate a reference I knew to be somewhere within the pages of the 39 issues I produced.

The clarity and usefulness of Janet Hine's indexing work presents us with a sharp contrast to the extremely difficult problem of access to the materials which are, in the ultimate, the subject of articles in the journal she was indexing. Journals like *Archives and Manuscripts* are compiled so that people may have information about a particular topic. Indexes to them are compiled so that that information may be available with the least possible trouble. The archival materials of which they treat are created for different purposes altogether — as the by-product of administrative or executive action, as Hilary Jenkinson said. This problems lies at the heart of the discipline known as archives management. I tried to bring it out in a humorous way in a piece of doggerel I wrote for one of the early issues<sup>11</sup> — a piece that, were I to take it at all seriously, I think I would have to say gave me greater pleasure than anything else I did for the journal. The poem focussed on the departmental filing system used in most, if not all, Queensland Government departments, and brought to that Colony from New South Wales, from which it was declared separate in 1859. The system was the Annual Single Number System, by which inwards correspondence is numbered sequentially within each year, starting from 1 onwards. As a

second, or follow-up, letter on the same subject arrives in the registry, it is given a number to represent its place in the sequence, and all earlier correspondence on the same subject is dredged up from the file room, and attached to the back of the latest. Thus in the words of my piece

So through the ages, clerk to clerk, the System passes down,  
The acme of good government; all our achievements crown,  
This product of our way of life — and this the acid test  
That never shall a file be found, where it was meant to rest.

Where registers are kept, and assiduously entered up, the system provides no great problem, though it is sometimes a tedious business to trace through a series of entries, possibly covering several years, to locate the residual number (under which the correspondence was filed). Where clerks were careless in entering up the registers, or where the files have fallen to pieces, or where (as sometimes happens) the top letter is missing, and therefore it is difficult to find where it *should* be filed, the system provides all sorts of problems. I referred to the troublesome business of sorting out the multitudinous papers of a department whose records were supposedly arranged by this system, but had fallen into disarray, in the closing lines of my piece, which was published at the time that Allan Horton, one time officer in charge of the Archives Department of the Public Library of New South Wales, 'defected' to the world of librarianship.

And archivists are giving up — their resignations tender,  
They've battled on for years and years, but victory's chance is slender.  
And if they're asked, 'Why'd you resign? Why follow Allan Horton?'  
They all reply — with one accord — 'It's single number sortin'.'

Eventually, of course, I followed Allan Horton myself, and gave up the fascinating, if somewhat esoteric world of archives for library service. But I shall never forget my days as an archivist — and least of all those many hours I spent editing the journal.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Macaulay. Literary essays contributed to the *Edinburgh Review*. Moore's life of Lord Byron, June 1830.
2. Charles Lamb. *Essays of Elia*. 'Two races of man.'
3. R.C. Sharman. 'The resources of the Queensland State Archives for use in creative writing.' *Archives and Manuscripts* Vol 3 No 2. May 1966. pp 21-29.
4. R.B. Joyce. 'Librarians can win historians, and still influence other people.' *Ibid* Vol 2 No 3, July 1962, pp 1-11.
5. R.C. Sharman. 'The arrangement and description of maps in the Queensland State Archives.' *Ibid* Vol 2 No 3, July, pp 24-29.
6. R.C. Sharman. 'Victory in Victoria: an outsider's comments on the Public Records Act, 1973, of that State.' *Ibid* Vol 5 No 4, August 1973, pp 85-90.

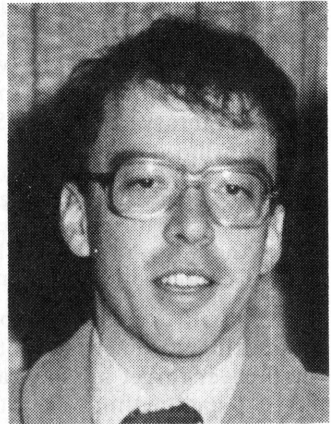


7. Geoffrey Sawyer. 'Copyright in letters unpublished at writer's death.' *Ibid* Vol 3 No 3, November 1966, pp 27-29. 'Copyright in letters not published at the author's death.' *Ibid* Vol 4 No 5 November 1971, pp 1-3.
8. Graeme Powell. 'The origins of the Australian Joint Copying Project.' *Ibid* Vol 4 No 5, November 1971, pp 9-24. 'The operation of the Australian Joint Copying Project.' *Ibid* Vol 4 No 7, May 1972, pp 4-16.
9. G. Lindsay Lockley. 'Congregational Archival material in Australia.' *Ibid* Vol 3 No 7, November 1968, pp 8-13.
10. J.F. Atchison. 'Archives of a Joint-Stock Company; the Australian Agricultural Company; its system of administration and its records.' *Ibid* Vol 4 No 3, November 1970, pp 21-32. Geoffrey Sawyer, op cit. J. Hagan. 'W.E. Murphy's manuscripts as sources for Australian Social History.' Vol 4 No 5, November 1971, pp 4-8. Michael Piggott. 'At the drawing board; problems in the professional education of the archivist.' *Ibid* Vol 4 No 5 November 1971, pp 25-32.
11. R.C. Sharman. 'The annual single number system.' *Ibid* Vol 1 No 8, December 1960, p 14.

## Into the Great Unknown

### Andrew Lemon

It is not easy to communicate within a small profession scattered across Australia. Conferences have their virtues but only some members can attend. Those who do will sleep through a proportion of the illuminating addresses. Everyone ultimately depends on the professional literature, though not even this is a guarantee that the message will get across. The most well-intentioned reader can put aside a journal to be read at a later day that never comes. Wisdom, waiting to be shared, is lost again. The only way to be sure of getting the information is by becoming editor of *Archives and Manuscripts*.



Andrew Lemon

While the articles I have read more recently merge into a blur, the articles of my three-year reign as editor remain part of my mental furniture, in the second-hand warehouse of my mind. I feel stupidly fond of them all — Peter Orlovich's old man river of assumptions on which a course designed for the professional education of archivists should be based; Bill Russell's essay on archival ethics illustrated by tales of the Gulargumbone Archives and the conservation equipment which turned out to be a lamington machine; Tom Nielsen's articles (translated by the editor from the original Technical) on patching disintegrating archives; and all the rest that