

For the interested inquirer the tape and transcript have, of course, many more interesting details relating to Phyllis Mander-Jones and her work with the Mitchell Library.

Spending that afternoon with Phyllis Mander-Jones was one of the most memorable events of my life. I remember her with great respect and with affection. Her achievements and her generous friendship are continuing inspirations. In my work, I am constantly reminded in a multitude of ways of the great debts that Australian scholarship and documentary custodianship owe this remarkable woman. Her intelligence, industry and foresight have established an indelible legacy.

The Indispensable 'Mander-Jones'

Eric Richards*

The real problem is weight, and the reviewers did not address it. A few years ago it would not have mattered so much: the long-distance scholar could settle in for a month in the ship's library, untroubled by the weight of learning. Now there is little choice, the pinched violence of the economy-class Boeing must be endured, and only twenty kilograms of gear. Thus the streamlined Australian historian heads off for Heathrow, pared to a minimum, reduced to one change of clothes, a passport, a Britrail pass, a copy of *Record Repositories in Great Britain*, and Phyllis Mander-Jones' *Manuscripts in the British Isles relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*.¹ A handsome volume and utterly indispensable, of course, but the very thought sends the scales quivering into 'excess baggage'. There will be copies in Edinburgh and at the British Library, improbably in Shrewsbury and Truro, and certainly not at Thurles or Haverfordwest. 'Mander-Jones' is too much like those perfectly comprehensive guidebooks to foreign places: so essential that they must be razored or photocopied into portable pieces to fit the traveller's bags.

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In every other way historians in Australia will proclaim 'Mander-Jones' as not only indispensable but also wonderfully 'user-friendly'. Its virtues are manifold and well recognised. In one volume, for the first time, are listed the locations of manuscript collections in Britain and Ireland relating to Australia and the Pacific: it includes the obvious public and institutional collections but also encompasses private sources and even some esoteric caches unthought of by most historians: who, for example, would have expected data on Parramatta, 1844, in the Whittington Barracks at Lichfield? It is a minor miracle of compression and clarity: an almost inconceivable quantity of evidence is marshalled with careful annotations and pithy guides to conditions of access in the actual repositories. Each section is, in itself, an entree to the several hundred locations which came under the eye of Miss Mander-Jones and her assistants. The Index is vast and precise, and covers many particular subjects as well as people and places; in effect it provides 'a frame-work for research on specific subjects'. The volume performs its basic functions, as a utilitarian guide to sources, with reassuring reliability, but it also opens windows on the possibilities of research of which historians and others may never have thought. It is undoubtably a jewel in the crown of Australian bibliography and stands comparison with parallel American and British works.

It was little wonder that, when it was published in 1972, historians and other users, fell upon 'Mander-Jones' with noisy welcome. 'An immensely impressive contribution to historical scholarship', wrote one reviewer, 'an archival survey of breathtaking range' announced another, and most would have agreed that this was 'the most important research aid to historians which has been published in this generation'.² Everyone was impressed by the detail and the astonishing thoroughness of the work, and the elegance of its finished form.

The compilation of 'Mander-Jones', no doubt, was a saga in its own right, sponsored by the Australian National University in conjunction with the Australian National Library. Its production over about seven years, ran parallel with, and was the vital complement of, the work of the Australian Joint Copying Project.³ In the modest Introduction to her volume, Miss Mander-Jones eschewed any nonsense about coverage or definitiveness, and stated bluntly and properly that 'It is evident that a survey of this kind must be out of date very quickly.' Despite appearances to the contrary 'Mander-Jones' does not explore every loft, ancient safe, and cellar in the British Isles. The Introduction sets out the principles of selection employed by the team, and indicates the practical and intelligent compromises which were inevitable in the making of this monumental work. 'Mander-Jones' was a labour of unobtrusive professionalism, a well-forged tool for the itinerant scholar. It did more than simply create lists of other lists: it was a work of discovery and retrieval which exposed foundations of Australian history which, in some parts, were previously unsuspected.

'Mander-Jones' and the Australian Joint Copying Project were twin forces in the revolution in historical scholarship in this country over the past twenty years. Between them, and in association with the relative decline in international airfares, it is now possible to conduct original and sophisticated research from an Australian base in a manner scarcely conceivable forty years ago. It might even be said that, to a degree, the present generation of historians is better off than it deserves: both the A.J.C.P. and 'Mander-Jones', it seems, are still markedly underutilised.⁴ But then they were created for posterity, for future labourers in the British/Australian vineyards.

Meanwhile the work of collection and copying continues, and nothing is more certain than that 'Mander-Jones' will become progressively incomplete. So large, expert, and expensive a task is unlikely to be repeated in this century, or to undergo revisions and new editions. Consequently the need for regular supplementation will bear an increasing premium, especially as the sources of Australian history widen and deepen. For instance, in the years since Miss Mander-Jones perambulated the British Isles, there has been a gathering interest among Australian historians in the letters of ordinary (even semi-literate) migrants, and unorthodox sources have been excavated by various scholars and collectors. The Handbook, Guides and Indexes of the A.J.C.P., published regularly since 1972, provide working supplements to 'Mander-Jones'. More especially, of course, they indicate the extent to which the sources listed in her volume have been copied and deposited in Australia.

Eventually 'Mander-Jones' will have to be expanded, or a matching sequel prepared. But the standard has been set by her work and, whatever happens, the long-distance Australian historian will continue to submit to the mercy of the excess-baggage inspectors.

FOOTNOTES

1. Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1972.
2. Paul M. Kennedy in *Australian Journal of Politics and History* Vol 19 1973, p.143; S.J. Routh, *Australian Library Journal* Vol. 22 1973, p.198; and 'Books Received'. *Historical Studies* Vol. 15 1973, p.665; Trevor Reese, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* Vol. II 1974; Robert Kubicek. *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 47 1974, pp. 115-6; *Times Literary supplement*, 20 April 1973.
3. Its progress is conveniently chronicled in Graeme Powell, 'The Copying of Australian Records in Britain, 1883-1983', *Australian Historical Association Bulletin* Vol. 39, June 1984, pp. 12-16.
4. Powell, *op. cit.*, p.15.