



NEWS NOTES

COMMONWEALTH ARCHIVES:

Mr Peter Scott has been appointed to the position of Archivist in the Commonwealth Archives Office. Mr Scott has recently been on the staff of the Department of French in the University of Sydney and spent much of his spare time over the last few years in acting as Honorary Research Secretary to the Society of Australian Genealogists.

This unassuming notice appeared in *Archives and Manuscripts* (Vol. 2 No. 5) in June 1963 (which was, incidentally, the first issue to be printed instead of duplicated).

Last year, continuing ill health forced Peter to retire after a distinguished career in Australian Archives (known as the Commonwealth Archives Office until 1974), first in Canberra and later in Sydney (and, for a while, in both simultaneously—or should I say synchronically).

The Commonwealth Department of Administrative Services recognised Peter's substantial and significant contribution to the development and implementation of the series system of controlling records and archives by awarding him a National Australia Day Achievement Award this year. The award was presented on 25 January by the Deputy General Manager of the Department, Tony Hillier, at a ceremony in Sydney attended by staff from Australian Archives (both from Sydney and Canberra) and by heads of other archival institutions in Sydney.

Members of the Society and readers of this journal will recall that Peter was made an Honorary Member of the Society in 1985.

To mark his retirement, three people who have worked closely with him over the years have kindly contributed their appreciations of Peter.

Recalled by Clive Smith a second time from geographical and professional “limbo” (perhaps as C(ommonwealth) P(ersons) 6) to share in a joint tribute to Peter Scott, now that he is retired from the Australian Archives, I again underestimated the lead time from submission of text to publication. This however gave me the advantage that I could read Hilary Rowell’s and Stephen Stuckey’s contributions and therefore by agreeing with everything they say as to Peter’s personal qualities and knowing they have described the relevant work processes in some detail, can hope to provide a *short* piece as prescribed.

There is so much I would like to discuss—but another time perhaps. On the personal side I would just like to add that, if anything, they have done slightly less than justice to Peter’s musical ability—I know, in part at least from one of my extra-mural Canberra activities (membership of the Cultural Development Committee), that Peter’s playing of the viola was of potentially professional standard.

I pointed out in my tribute to Jim Gibbney, that the 60’s proved a critical decade for the development of what is now the Australian Archives; and what I hope to do now is to set Peter’s achievement into context. In the broadest sense he achieved two things. First he provided the final building block in the progress towards “integrated current and co-called intermediate” records management which I and numerous colleagues inside and outside the Archives saw as not only important in itself but, particularly in the case of the Commonwealth government, essential to a sound archival (in the traditional sense) program. Secondly, that same “building block”, being the solution to our long-standing problem of arranging and describing the archives produced under the increasingly fluid administrative arrangements of the Government, became the foundation for the comprehensive range of activities and coverage that distinguishes the Australian Archives as it now stands.

I will return to Peter’s achievements shortly but it is fair to point out, and I think Peter would be the first to agree, that most of the functions listed by Hilary in her second paragraph (microfilm and rebinding excluded) were somewhere in the system by the early sixties, even including “survey” which however had been seen as a departmental “registrar” responsibility during the life of that rather short-lived speciality. Peter would also agree that his “flash of genius” occurred in the climate of a long-standing pursuit of “ideal” classificatory techniques for records of which Keith Penny and I had been pursuing (even to the extent of seeking and receiving advice at the “philosophical” level from Professors Partridge and Passmore) ever since the Schellenberg seminars in 1954. To cut (at any rate for now) a long story short, what Peter did, in simple terms, was to postulate adaptation of the single-number registration system, supported by “subject” and “name” indexes for current files as recommended for departmental offices for the numbering of archival series

as and when registered supported by indexes of creating, transferring, etc. offices, persons, etc. I do not know how long Peter savoured his insight before explaining it to Keith Penny, or how long then elapsed before Keith burst through my office door; but on hearing the proposition, not a minute elapsed before I stated "that's it" or words to that effect, and from then on, whatever the problems that still lay ahead that *was* it. As Keith and I both recognized, this approach preserved the *essence* of the two basic principles of provenance and respect for original order, but varied the priorities of use for "classificatory" purposes. *Pace* Gerald Fischer, convenience of repository management was an incidental benefit. This last comment I have made partly because when hastily reviewing the relevant articles, courtesy of the Queensland State Archives and the copies of the seminal articles kindly supplied by Clive, it occurred to me that while in print I had been advocating the (year and) single-number for broad policy-making departments I had not 'resiled' (favourite word of politicians on the defensive) in print from supporting the Jenkinson "Archive Group/Class" approach for arranging archives. Some, perhaps including old friend Meyer Fishbein of the U.S. National Archives who alone criticised Peter's 1966 article in the 'American Archivist', may have thought that my departure to SEATO in 1968 might have been because I opposed the new approach. Not so, there was some official frustration but my reasons for departing for what proved to be five or so very rewarding years, were definitely non-official.

All the above notwithstanding I still have not done full justice to Peter's achievement. I still remember my Ancient History Professor's comment on one of my essays. She wrote "Concepts without precepts are empty—precepts without concepts are blind." The thinking out and formulation of concepts occurs reasonably often, and the fashioning and promulgation of precepts (many blind) are commonplace. However, the recognition of a concept and the fashioning and promulgation of a vast network of precepts while initiating colleagues in the process, is very rare. To achieve that, in the face of debilitating illness and the Canberra weather, was to me worthy, if one existed, of an archival *Nobel Prize*. I hope that retirement is even more kind to Peter than it has proved for me, but I hope too that he does not leave the archival scene for anywhere near as long as I have.

Ian Maclean

(formerly Chief Archivist, Commonwealth Archives Office, now retired)

I first met Peter Scott in March 1971 when I joined his Registration and Disposal Section of the then Commonwealth Archives Office in Canberra. Registration and Disposal was one of the three sections with functional responsibilities, the other two being Reference and Access, and Repository Management.

The span of Registration and Disposal was very broad, covering surveying, identifying and registering records in agency custody, organising transfers, the arrangement and description of records in custody, micro-filming, rebinding, custody and ownership cases, the preparation of finding aids, administrative history research, personal archives matters and disposal arrangements including the preparation of disposal authorities. The section included two Survey and Disposal Sub-sections, the Context and Documentation Control Sub-section and CRS Registry. At that time the Central Office and ACT Regional Office activities had not been split, so Peter was responsible for directing Australia-wide as well as ACT regional activities.

I was appointed to the recently created Context and Documentation Control Sub-section, then headed by Chris Hurley. The sub-section drew together matters relating to arrangement and description, the preparation of finding aids and administrative history research. Peter had a particular interest in the sub-section as it enabled the concentration of more effort on these areas than had been possible when staff also had responsibility for survey, transfer and disposal matters.

A major project during this period was the arrangement, description and microfilming of the records of the pre 1942 administrations of what is now Papua New Guinea, prior to the return of the original records to Port Moresby. He had a special interest in and enthusiasm for the project. He felt it was one of those rare opportunities for an archivist to handle the records of a whole administration—to investigate and describe the administrative structures and to arrange and describe its records. The records needed traditional skills in identifying original order as much of the material had been packed and despatched to Australia during the Japanese invasion of PNG in 1942 and arrived through a number of different routes.

He had undertaken most of the administrative history research to establish the basic structure of the administrations. An anthropologist friend doing research in PNG said that she had found the basic outline of organisations prepared by Peter the clearest explanation she had found of the complicated series of administrations in PNG.

I prepared a number of PNG series registrations under Peter's eagle eye. I had to justify all decisions. It was the best possible introduction to arrangement and description work—Peter was able to pass on his knowledge as well as his enthusiasm for the project.

Peter was particularly keen to interest and train new staff in archival theory and practice. He would set a passage from an archival manual for Chris and me to read (usually Jenkinson's). We would then have a meeting with Peter in which we would discuss the practices and principles involved and the way in which they were or were not implemented in

our Office. If they were not implemented, we considered why not and whether they should be.

Peter personally trained a number of ACT based graduate clerks as well as some from Sydney and Melbourne in the CRS System. He supervised projects to set up the administrative history framework for the new regional offices (eg Tasmania in 1974) or regions converting to the CRS System. He also contributed to the general training programs organised by Barbara Ross, outlining the history and development of the CRS System and overseeing arrangement and description training projects. Through this direct contact, he had a considerable influence on many staff, a number of whom now work in other archival institutions.

He encouraged staff to join the UK Society of Archivists as the Australian Society had not been formed. He was also enthusiastic about the formation of the Australian Society although his health prevented him from attending many meetings.

About two weeks before I joined, Peter's section moved from the Romney Huts in Parkes beside Kings Avenue Bridge to accommodation in Leichhardt Street Kingston above a hardware store and timber yard. We were scattered in rooms around the perimeter of a large, badly lit, dusty concrete area.

Peter never came to terms with Canberra winters—and Leichhardt Street was not the best place to endure them. I remember Peter wearing his dark grey top coat all day—particularly during the times we were without heating for several days. The Parkes staff would lend us many of their electric heaters—and then we would blow the fuses.

For Peter one of the only things in favour of the Kingston location was that it was near one of the best music shops in Canberra. Peter used to walk up to Kingston at lunchtime and buy sheet music. You would come across him in his office at lunchtime practising fingering with new sheet music. (I understand he plays the viola well.)

Peter had bad patches with his health when he would be away for two or three days a week for several weeks—often during winter. It was during these periods that you realised the range of matters he dealt with—especially when you had to deal with a number of his phone calls from regions and agencies. Also you realised just how much work he could get through even though he was obviously ill and only working two or three days a week. He used these periods of forced inactivity to think about projects. He would often return from sick leave with lists of ideas or tasks to be done. There are also on file old envelopes which he used to record ideas while cooking dinner.

In mid 1972 Central Office and ACT Regional activities were split and Peter remained responsible for the Registration and Disposal Section,

Central Office made up of the Survey and Disposal Policy sub-section, the Context and Documentation Control sub-section and CRS Registry. This split enabled Peter to develop the administrative history research and preparation of finding aids further.

Prior to this, a very high proportion of the inventories of series (lists of series recorded by agencies) had been prepared by Peter personally, mostly, I suspect, in his own time. Peter had also prepared many of the agency registration sheets (description sheets outlining the creation, abolition, functions, predecessors, successors, etc. of an agency). He also approved all agency registrations before they were allocated agency numbers by CRS Registry and all inventories of series. His knowledge of Commonwealth administrative structures as well as of those of the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea is impressive.

His grasp of detail over a range of matters was amazing. Staff used Peter as a corporate memory or an index. He could usually tell you precedent cases, exact file numbers and approximate dates of events. There was frequently an informal queue outside his room of staff wanting to ask questions.

He is also a perfectionist and has the ability to glance through a document and pick up inconsistencies or errors quickly. His reputation for this reached legendary proportions. Ross Shannon who worked on the processing of records under Peter in the 1960s, used to say that if there was only one mislabelled box in the repository in an obscure location, Peter would walk past and notice it.

I could also outline work Peter did on the first release of Cabinet Office papers in 1972, for Dr Lamb's visit in 1973, on trying to get support from parent departments for ADP implementation, on preparing for the opening of the Tasmanian Branch in 1974, on the Technical Support Group for the Archives Task Force (which never eventuated) in 1974-1975, on liaising with the ABC on non-paper records, and on many other projects. However space does not allow it.

In conclusion, I think I will remember Peter for his ability to cope with a broad range of matters, for his grasp of detail, for his courage in coping with his illness and for his sympathy for others who were ill.

I hope he will continue to point out errors in the finding aids and contribute to finding aids and the archival literature for years to come.

Hilary Rowell

(Assistant Director, Implementation & Support, Records Information Management, Australian Archives)

Where does one start when one sits down to write a few words in honour of Peter John Scott? Innumerable images or instances come to

mind, not necessarily all of them being suitable for telling here. So, I start at the beginning.

At about 9.15 am on Monday, 9 July 1973 Edmund Rutledge and I were introduced to Peter Scott. That was our first day at a full-time job, our first work day in Canberra (I can remember an extremely heavy frost, which was the first of the occurrences that day that made me question whether I was doing the right thing!). We were at the Commonwealth Archives Office as the last of the 1973 graduate trainees, and were both in Canberra for technical training and indoctrination before being sent back to Sydney as the first graduates to be employed in the NSW office. We had been given an introduction by the Personnel officer, and were then told, in hushed tones, that we were going to be taken to see PETER SCOTT. The tones were those that I imagine were used by those about to be ushered into the presence of the Great Khan, (another) Peter the Great, or at least some minor potentate. With the arrogant assurance of the newly graduated, I listened to what I was being told by this remarkably young and quietly-spoken man in an office overburdened by piles of files. It did not take me long to realise that it was not a great ruler I was in the presence of (though he had some dictatorial times when it suited him!), but a great thinker. Perhaps my images of the event are still so clear because of the impression that this man made upon me.

I had used some archives whilst writing my thesis and had not been overwhelmed by their interest as anything more than old files, but here was a man who was obviously so gripped by his subject, so much on top of what he blithely talked about, that you couldn't help but be impressed by him. This impression was reinforced (as maybe it was designed to be) by the next six months of training and continual exposure to things that had "PJS" in the top left-hand corner. Naturally the training manual contained the famous articles from *The American Archivist*, and we were advised quite strongly by Chris Hurley to read those *very* carefully. Little did I realise that for some years I was to be given unannounced oral exams on that training manual! I remember wondering what could be so rivetting about agencies, series and respect for that guy Des Fonds. I read Jenkinson and Schellenberg and the rest, but always seemed to get more out of listening to, and sometimes disagreeing with, "Mr Scott".

Not long after we left Canberra to try to introduce some of the concepts we had learned to the Philistines in both the CAO and agencies in Sydney, we were told that Peter Scott was going to replace Bruce Byrne as the Senior Archivist in NSW. It was only on a part-time basis, however, as he was to retain his position in Central Office. This filled me with some apprehension, and amazement that a man could run the two jobs, both of which required a great deal of time and effort. I was soon to learn that not only could Peter put in that time and effort, but his prodigious

abilities were such that he could ensure that both areas he was responsible for were developed. The commuting wore him down, and exacerbated his illness, and for his willingness to carry on the Australian Archives owes an enormous debt of gratitude.

What I thank Peter most for is his commitment to his staff, and to me not least of all. His energies in developing his staff were also prodigious. As still an arrogant graduate, I did not realise that his continuing questioning of what you did, and why you recommended what you had were not because he liked to run you down, but because he wanted you to be able to present your views. It was only when I realised his intention that I was able to start to come to grips with what I was doing. Having to confront Peter on any subject does wonders for your self-confidence and analytical skills! But that said, he was not one to suffer fools gladly, and brushed aside many he did not see as being committed to what they were doing. His intellect was so great, so dominating, that many were unable to cope with it.

What do I most remember Peter for? That intellect, of course, and its amazing ability to come to grips with so many things at once. His urge to confront and control the new, like non-paper records. His phenomenal memory, where he could remember things like dates, and file numbers, with uncanny accuracy. His compassion for his staff, his unbelievable stoicism in the face of a debilitating disease. His temper, which was legend (but he once showed me how he could “put it on” at will, much to my amazement as he quickly wound himself up into what appeared to be a rage, and then just as quickly replaced with a grin and the comment that “It’s easy to do and it’s handy at times”!). His hidden self, which his shyness kept under wraps, and which included a great love of music, and Armagnac and other fine bounty of the vine. But most I remember Peter for his leadership and his commitment. I have stayed in this profession because of the training that he gave me.

The archival profession, but more particularly anyone who worked with him in the 1960’s and 1970’s, owes Peter Scott an enormous debt.

Stephen Stuckey
(Director, Disposal, Australian Archives)