

International News Notes

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Pacific Manuscripts Bureau

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The Bureau concentrated on work in Canberra for most of 2004. Three major in-house microfilming projects were completed: the papers of Shirley and Beatrice Baker relating to Tonga, the papers of Sir Colin Allan on the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and correspondence mainly relating Nauru and Banaba (Ocean Island) of the Pacific Phosphate Co Ltd and other predecessors of the British Phosphate Commissioners. Sixteen smaller in-house microfilming projects were completed, including: Norman Wilson's papers on political education in PNG, 1963-1978; Roy Pullen's correspondence while on fieldwork for the CSIRO in PNG, 1956-1970; Sister Helen Leishman's correspondence from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, 1930-1948; Will Stober's unpublished, *Isles of Disenchantment: The Fletcher/Jacomb Correspondence, 1913-1921*; and Basil Shaw's thesis, *Somare: A Political Biography of the First Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea*, 1991.

Working in Sydney, the Bureau surveyed, listed and transferred research materials on politics in Fiji collected by Dr Robert Norton of Macquarie University. Documents on land surveys and urban development in Tuvalu collected by Mr George Clarke were also transferred to the Bureau. Also in Sydney, discussions were held with Ms Viki John on the preservation and disposition of the archives of the Bougainville Freedom Movement.

After Cyclone Heta hit Niue in January 2004 the Bureau consulted with Jocelyn Cumings, one of two conservators from the National Library of NZ, who visited various archives in Niue to help preserve documents

damaged by the cyclone. The Bureau sent a spare RSPAS (Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies) Dukane microfilm reader to the Niue Justice Department and organised digital conversion of microfilm of Niue births registers. Ewan Maidment visited Niue in July 2004 to microfilm damaged lands records held in the Justice Department.

In Auckland, on the way to Niue, Ewan carried out a further survey of the Greenpeace New Zealand archives and microfilmed its *Newsletter* and some collections of documents relating to voyages protesting against nuclear tests in the Pacific.

An ongoing PMB microfilming project in the Cook Islands was continued in November 2004. Its aim is to copy the Resident Commissioner's Office files of correspondence of the Resident Agents in the outer islands, 1900-1970.

The Bureau made two reports to the Director-General of the National Archives of Australia, drawing attention to the need to provide support to the National Archives of the Solomon Islands, and at the Director-General's request asked Ian Scales, an ANU graduate student, for an update report which was presented in June 2004.

The Bureau provided reports, lists and general advice to field archivists, Garth Crockford and Christine Gordon, who worked on the archives of the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga in April to May and July.

The Bureau lost its storage facility in I Block in March, but established a new repository in the Pacific and Asian History storage cage in the Acton Underhill tunnel which holds about thirty record groups. Much of the material is held temporarily while being processed and microfilmed pending transfer to long term accommodation. In addition the Bureau is holding on to papers of some Pacific researchers associated with the ANU in the continuing expectation that the University will make archival arrangements to accommodate such material in the near future.

About 130 archives boxes of papers remaining at Bob Langdon's home after his death in 2003 were arranged and box listed. In June 2004 most of the Langdon Papers were transferred to the National Library of Australia Manuscripts Section, but records relating to the Bureau were retained, including some correspondence, collected manuscripts and card indexes. Most of the manuscripts which Bob Langdon collected were already microfilmed by the Bureau. The Bureau will make

arrangements to return them to their custodians. A few have not yet been microfilmed.

The Bureau helped rescue a group of research reports on PNG agricultural economics which Dr Richard Shand left in his room in the Coombs Building after he retired. The Shand papers have been listed and microfilmed. A good set of papers on technical education policies and planning in PNG leading up to independence was transferred to the Bureau by Professor Mark Turner of the University of Canberra in May 2004. The papers, which belonged to Ian Hossack, were given to Professor Turner in the early 1990s when he was a visitor in the Division of Political and Social Change, RSPAS. The research papers of the late Dorothy Shineberg were processed under the Bureau's supervision and we have preserved her invaluable database of indentured labourers in New Caledonia.

The Bureau also pursued a digitisation scoping project, having scanned several collections of photographs and one record group of eleven rolls of microfilm copies of documents to digital masters. It is planned to make the digital documents accessible, at least to the PMB member libraries, via the ANU's DSpace repository. The PMB website was extensively revised by Alex Roberts. He also updated the PMB online database catalogue. Richard Overy, who did a thorough review of the revised website, checked all the links, commented that the new version is a, 'great improvement, easier to use and to find things ... you have kept it simple, straightforward and uncluttered'.

Wanganui District Council: New Zealand

Correspondent: Mr Richard Overy

Background to Wanganui

The town of Wanganui, situated at the mouth of the Whanganui River on the west coast of the North Island, acquired its first white settlers in the early 1840s. It became the New Zealand Company's second settlement. This was largely as a result of the Company not having enough land at Wellington to provide immigrants with the sections they were promised. With a port, a relatively central location, and fertile surrounding farmland, Wanganui became for a time one of New Zealand's major towns. Since the 1930s it has lost that status, with the

greater use of road and rail transport, centralisation of shipping at the main ports, and the faster growth of other more central cities, especially Palmerston North.

Although there is evidence of the existence of some earlier Road Boards, Local Government in the area effectively began in 1862 with the formation of the Wanganui Town Board. In 1924, as various suburban authorities amalgamated with the Wanganui Borough Council, the town became a city. A further amalgamation took place in 1989, when the former counties merged with the city to form the present Wanganui District, which currently has a population of approximately 45 000. The District Council Archives reflect this administrative history, with records dating from 1862 to the present, and including those of the amalgamated authorities.

Recordkeeping in Wanganui District Council

Records management was for many years seen only as a low-level activity within Corporate Services under an 'Administration Manager'. Around 2001 responsibility for records was placed within the new division of *Finance and Information*.

Wanganui District Council did not formally establish an archives until 1993 when it was created with assistance from the then National Archives of New Zealand. Eamonn Bolger was seconded from the National Archives for one year, principally in response to pressure from community groups, genealogical societies and the general public. The Council Archives was placed under the Community Development Director and was until quite recently seen more as a community service than as a corporate resource. The position of Archivist was created in 1994.

Since March 2004, Records and Archives have been treated as a single unit. In 2005, the unit was moved again, this time to the Corporate Planning division.

The broad concept of Information Management (IM) appears to be poorly understood and not implemented. IM is not seen or managed in a holistic way. There is a fragmented approach to managing issues as they arise, the result is a patchwork of bits and pieces, often only loosely connected. If understood at all, IM was thought to be vaguely associated with Information Technology (IT). There were and still are information

silos (at least fifteen of them) throughout the organisation. Recordkeeping is highly fragmented, idiosyncratic and of variable quality. Information is often hard to find – or not found. This makes good information management very difficult.

The traditional approach and attitude towards Records Management is little more than basic. As a result, there was uncontrolled creation of new files, various uncontrolled identification systems, erratic filing of correspondence and papers, and electronic copies of internal documents ‘filed’ on shared network drives in an uncontrolled fashion.

Many staff members in the Council still refer to the Records Office as the ‘Mail Room’ or the ‘Filing Room’. Records staff still do the ‘mail’, along with a multitude of other low-level administrative things like operating a folding machine for bulk mailouts, preparing the daily mailbag, sealing documents, photocopying for others, and so on.

There has never been a records management program prior to 2004. A professional Archivist, Penny Allen, has managed the Council Archives very well at operational level since 1994. But Archives was not receiving any adequate attention at management level. Traditionally it was and still is seen by most as ‘old files and stuff’. It is still perceived by many as having more of a community service function than a corporate one. Accommodation has been a continuously difficult issue in which the Records and Archives Manager and the Archivist have had almost no input and no control. The Records and Archives relationship with IT barely existed until recently, traditionally being seen as quite separate and unrelated.

The Records and Archives Program

Below is a brief outline of our plans since 2004.

- Develop a program for Records Management.
- Develop a strategy for RM.
- Introduce a new functional classification and a new numbering system.
- Draft an IM strategy that includes Recordkeeping.
- Develop new policies for IM, and update those for Records Management and Archives.

- A new recordkeeping procedures manual.
- Training for records staff.
- Develop standards, guidelines, advice and general information for all staff.
- Select and implement a modern EDRMS program.
- Archives accommodation.
- Improve the Records and Archives profile within the Council through information promotion.
- Promote Records and Archives as an integral part of the Council's information resource.
- Develop and introduce retention and disposal schedules.

The progress we have made

- Policies, procedures and strategy have been issued in draft form and await formal approval.
- New classification and file numbering fully developed and being introduced in small manageable phases.
- Records procedures manual in draft.
- Advice, guidelines and general information now available to all staff through the Council Intranet - valuable information and advice was only available previously on external websites especially those of Archives New Zealand, the National Archives of Australia, and State Records NSW.
- EDRMS selected and acquired.
- Records setup and customisation completed.
- Legacy data imports being tested.

Our Issues & Challenges

- Gaining and maintaining management support. Presentations have been made to senior managers, as a team and individually.

- Obtaining real buy-in and sufficient support from executives and senior management team.
- Obtaining official approval and sign-off for new policies.
- Gaining some champions among upper levels of management.
- Obtaining acceptance from staff – many appear reluctant, mostly because they are unsure what it will mean for them.
- Changeover from old file system to new.
- Budget and cost.
- Rollout of EDRMS – first as a records management tool, then for document management.
- Improve perceptions of records and archives – what is often nowadays labeled as a ‘re-branding exercise’.
- A personal and professional ambition is to make a real and positive difference.

Observations

Although the organisation has been a slow starter and a latecomer in respect of the modern recordkeeping practices and techniques, Wanganui District Council has shown a basic willingness to address the issue of coherent information management and good recordkeeping. Being relatively small, the organisation has many constraints to overcome.

The issues and challenges are quite similar to those in many other places. Despite New Zealand being a developed and relatively sophisticated recordkeeping country, with legislation, regulations and guidelines, perceptions and attitudes towards recordkeeping and archives are hardly distinguishable from what might be observed in developing countries such as say Kiribati and Federated States of Micronesia or elsewhere in the region.

Once the new recordkeeping regime is in place, it will be essential to constantly review and update records programs. Management and staff education and awareness programs, through presentations, induction and training courses, will have to be an essential part of the work for many years to come.

