USE OF THESES

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This thesis embodies original research conducted by the author in the Department of Pacific History, Australian National University.

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INTRODUCTION.

It is one of the great misfortunes of the archivist that the majority of his professional problems are not universal. In fact, his is an occupation which is particularly confined by national boundaries and national traditions. The universality of most natural science is a bye-word; even librarians the world over have the advantages of a common language. But not so the archivists. It is not so much that they lack a means of communication, as that there exist a number of largely domestic languages. That this should be the case is due partly to accidents of development but mainly to the different circumstances, both historical and administrative, by which the archives have been brought into being. Without some means of equating one term with another, the use of familiar words in unfamiliar ways and the description of unfamiliar practices by familiar words creates the danger that some differences will remain more apparent than real while others are more real than is readily apparent. Consequently, ideas and practices cannot travel easily from one group of institutions to another.

Australian government archivists are not so isolated as some. They inherit archives created by an administrative tradition which has spread to many parts of the world from a common source. Though in time, administrative practices in Australia as in other parts of the former British Empire have been modified by local conditions, the registry records created by a department in Canberra
would still more closely resemble those in London than those (say) in Bonn. It follows from this that if any practices of archive administration can be transplanted easily into the Australian environment, they will be those already derived from the archives of the central government in the United Kingdom.

In fact, something of the British approach to these matters has been transmitted to Australia, chiefly through the medium of a Manual of Archive Administration. Many archivists in Australia have benefited greatly from this survey of departmental records as they have developed from the Middle Ages to more modern times, and also from the discussion of some of the problems of administration by which these archives are attended. Nevertheless, the fact remains that for a number of reasons, archives from the mediaeval period have exerted a pre-dominating influence on archivists in Great Britain, and many of the more detailed discussions of archives and the problems of their administration are grounded on experience gained with this class of material. Inevitably, the government archivist in Australia is confronted by references to types of record which are unfamiliar and by problems of arrangement and description which are foreign to his practical experience. He looks in vain for a comparable discussion of the ways in which record-keeping practices have evolved in more recent times, or of the modern administrative circumstances which have moulded the

structure and composition of the archives now in his custody. Such a theme must seem, by some standards, a minor one; it is difficult to believe that the administration of modern departmental archives can call for the same degree of intellectual preparation on the part of the archivist as do those from remoter periods. Nor can an investigation into these matters pretend to any great originality of design, since it must be little more than an extension of well mapped-out lines of inquiry into a new, more modern environment. But such claims to distinction as these modern archives may have cannot be ignored, for on their recognition depends the adequate treatment of much of the material now lying in repositories up and down the Commonwealth.

Moreover, the history of departmental records is not a matter of interest exclusively to archivists. An acquaintance with at least its principal features is an indispensable preliminary to any large-scale research in which this class of material is put to work. In fact, one of the most desirable of future developments in the field of historical inquiry in Australia would be for the academic world to become more aware not only of the traditional tenets of archive administration, but also of the way in which they are applied to records created by Australian public departments. This is not to suggest that every historian should become his own archivist. But if the records are to be exploited to the full, and advantage taken of such assistance as can be provided, it seems essential that historian and archivist should be in a position to communicate with each other. Only a familiarity with the history of departmental
4.

records - their character and the mode of their administration - can provide the necessary common ground.

We are aware, in general terms, that arrangements for the preservation and administration of older departmental records have been slow to appear in Australia, and that they have been the result of diverse pressures and influences. Library authorities, the academic world, historical societies, local pride and, in the case of the departments themselves, a fitful and often muddled recognition of the usefulness of older records, have each at one time or another produced the suggestion that some adequate provisions should be made to preserve departmental records and to make them readily accessible. In fact, however, achievements in this field have been limited, at least until more recent times. Between the two World Wars, bodies of older departmental records were from time to time placed in the custody of various learned institutions. But the choice of these archives was haphazard and their transfers intermittent. Nor, with one exception, was there any attempt to administer them as a distinctive class of material.

The present arrangements for the administration of departmental archives seem to owe little to such traditions as existed before the second World War. Libraries, academic circles and historical societies have been replaced by governments as the parties principally involved. Fresh vigour and life has come not from a renewed desire to serve historical scholarship but rather from an intention to clear congested record-rooms and well-filled basements. Where this idea
has taken firmest root, the selection of records is becoming less haphazard and the transfers to repositories less intermittent. But paradoxically enough, the very scale of the operations required to salvage thousands of feet of departmental records and ensure their physical safety; the complexity of the problems associated with the destruction of unwanted records; the sheer mechanics of establishing a satisfactory liaison between the repository and the departments—these activities have left the archivist with all too little time to examine the character of the vast inheritance which he is now winning for himself.

Consequently, the history of developments in the making of certain classes of departmental archives remains obscure in many respects, and the first examination of the archives now in repositories often leaves an impression of great confusion. We see single papers, files of papers, papers registered individually and files bearing a single control mark. Many of these items are accompanied by bulky volumes or by drawers full of cards of several sizes and colours, carrying different legends and offering a variety of information. Why are there sometimes volumes and sometimes cards, sometimes single papers and sometimes files? Which papers are connected with which volumes?—which cards relate to which papers, and how do volumes, cards and papers fit together? Why are the series seldom complete?—why do those transferred from one office often carry the markings of another? How is such material to be arranged?—how is it to be described?
These are some of the questions considered in the pages which follow. They do not survey all aspects of the preservation of departmental records in Australia, nor do they take into account every factor which has to be considered in devising measures for the administration of this material. They do not consider, for instance, the problems connected with the selection of records for permanent retention, nor do they touch directly on the complicated question of the training to be provided for archivists. It is not that either of these matters lacks intrinsic interest, but in both cases the issues raised are so numerous and so diverse in their ramifications that each provides virtually a separate field of study. What the following chapters set out to do is, in Part I, to indicate the stages by which provisions for the administration of departmental archives have evolved in Australia, and by means of this narrative, to illustrate the occasion for the present inquiry.

Then, in Part II, three chapters discuss in an Australian setting, the influence of the principal factors – systems of record-keeping, the organisation of individual departments and the pattern of Administrative Arrangements – which mould the character of departmental records. This section has provided the most difficult aspect of the whole inquiry. Originally, it was to have included a survey of registry records created by departments not only in Australia, but also in New Zealand and perhaps Fiji. Neither of the latter investigations proceeded beyond the material set out in Appendices B and C. Moreover, in its present form, Part II
barely covers developments throughout Australia. The usual problems of time and distance have contributed to this defeat, but in this case, they have been assisted by circumstances which for many years to come are likely to prove the despair of those who work with departmental archives. At present many groups of records are split between repository and department. The records of the New South Wales Lands Department referred to in Chapters 1 and 2 are a case in point. Some of the material is in archive custody, another part is in a repository for intermediate records, and the remainder (of uncertain size and content) is still in the departmental record-room. Again, much of the material now in archive repositories has not yet been brought under control. To trace the records once created by the Commonwealth Department of External Affairs between 1901 and 1916, for example, is a task to be measured in months rather than weeks. The use of archives for the purposes of conventional research is at the best of times a laborious business. But where it is the archives themselves which are the objects of inquiry, the obscurity as to the history and whereabouts of each body of archives makes it doubly difficult to re-assemble and investigate registry systems, and virtually impossible to examine in any extensive way the effect which evolution in the machinery and organisation of government has had on the structure of departmental archives. All that can be done is to let in an occasional shaft of light; to examine in detail the history and working of a few systems which may reasonably be supposed to be typical; to illustrate the way in which records were accumulated and employed by a modern
department; to take one set of changes in the organisation of
departments, individually and collectively, and to show their
effect on the body of records concerned.

Finally Part III is devoted to the problems which apparently
face both the archivist and the student public once records created
in such circumstances move from the departments into the repository.
These observations are based, of course, on inquiries directed
chiefly at the Commonwealth and New South Wales departmental archives,
and at this date it is difficult to determine the extent to which
they apply to the departmental archives of the other states.
What can be said with some confidence is that none of them are
likely to be irrelevant.
PART I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHIVE ADMINISTRATION

IN AUSTRALIA TO 1954.
1. **THE FIRST APPROACH.**

The period which began with Federation and ended in September 1939 saw little concrete progress in devising methods for the acquisition and administration of departmental archives. Circumstances varied from state to state but, with one notable exception, such arrangements as existed were largely makeshift in character. Governments of the day gave little thought to the records which their departments had accumulated over the years. They failed to appreciate (as commonly did their counterparts elsewhere) not only the administrative benefits of possessing a properly ordered record of past activities but also the economic consequences of not providing for the systematic selection and destruction of valueless material. However, in many cases, the state library authorities took action on behalf of what seemed to be historically important records. If there was nothing to be expected from the departments themselves, then it was fortunate indeed that several of the state libraries voluntarily extended their existing interest in manuscript material to include the acquisition and accommodation of selected bodies of older departmental records. Through these activities not only was a substantial body of such records made more accessible to the student public, but the whole question of providing for archive administration was to some extent kept alive.

As far as New South Wales and Victoria were concerned, no real machinery existed for the acquisition and administration of
departmental archives. Developments were governed almost entirely by the vigilance and enterprise of the libraries, by the resources of staff and accommodation and by the willingness of departments to observe an official instruction that records should not be destroyed without first being offered to the state library. Obviously enough, this last was not a reliable way of regulating the destruction of supposedly valueless material and it was a method all the more inexpedient where there was no continuously functioning authority to enforce and supervise its application. In this one respect at least, Western Australia was more favourably placed. There, a State Archives Board (comprising representatives of the Chief Secretary's Office and the Lands and Surveys Department, with the Principal Librarian as chairman) not only enforced a similar injunction to public departments, but was also empowered by the Premier to make whatever investigations it felt necessary and to secure from the departments any documents which it considered worthy of preservation.

Nevertheless, in spite of circumstances which were often unpromising, a substantial volume of records was transferred from departments to the custody of several of the state libraries. The Mitchell Library, which, in 1910, had made room for duplicate copies of despatches from the Governor of New South Wales to the Secretary

of State for the Colonies between 1813 and 1855, later received two extensive transfers of records from the Chief Secretary's Department as well as material from other departments. Between 1923 and 1939, the Public Library of Western Australia received deposits of archives from the Colonial Secretary's Office and the Lands and Surveys Department, governor's despatches to 1855 and duplicates of despatches from the Colonial Office to 1870. Again, in Victoria, the Public Library acquired series of records from the Chief Secretary's Department, the Ports and Harbours, Education, Law, Lands and Penal Departments.

But the resources and experience of the libraries were limited and it was as much as such institutions could do to provide


accommodation for these departmental archives. While, therefore, transfers usually meant greater physical safety for the material concerned, they were not followed by any sustained inquiry into the special claims of this class of material by way of arrangement and description. Indeed there was scarcely even any possibility of applying those techniques (binding, indexing, etc.) with which the library staffs were already familiar. Only in South Australia were special methods evolved and these formed part of a larger apparatus for the acquisition and administration of archives, public as well as private, which the Public Library brought into being between the two wars.

This was a development of singular interest, whose history may be taken as beginning with the publication in 1915 of Professor Henderson's Report on the Collection, Storage, and Preservation of Archives in Europe. The Report, which was prepared at the invitation of the Public Library and the South Australian Government, to all intents furnished a blueprint for what was to be the only fully-fledged archives institution in Australia before the outbreak of war in 1939.

In the text, Henderson considers the best location for an archives


repository in South Australia and the problems associated with constructing such a building, as well as the functions of the institution and the scope of its contents. To some extent he also touches on matters of archive administration, discussing both the period after which records should be transferred from departments to the repository and the problem of selecting the records which are suitable for permanent retention. But on the methods to be used in classifying and describing the contents of a repository he has nothing to say.

Five years after the Report was published the projected institution was a reality and the process of collecting material for what was by then known as the Archives Department of the Public Library had begun.

As far as the acquisition of official records were concerned, the Archives Department was strongly placed for the greater part of the period under review. In 1925 the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery and Institutes Act set out both the obligations of the departments in disposing of their records and the rights of the Library Board in respect of such material whether in public or private custody. But the staff of the Archives Department cast their net "Widely, as Henderson had prescribed and into their institution came not only the records of public departments but also

"... diaries, more particularly those of explorers; maps and plans; records of municipalities and district councils; newspapers, letters and other private papers of public men;

contemporary books and pamphlets; annual reports, proceedings and transactions of important societies, conferences and public companies, directories, almanacs, autobiographies, and reminiscences; paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, and portraits of public men. In short, any original document that will be of value to students who are engaged in original research into the history of South Australia. "9.

The special techniques employed for the administration of these archives were, so far as can be judged, devised entirely by the Archives Department. Accessions were divided into four types. A single series of papers (e.g. a series of inwards letters), a volume or several volumes, would be identified as a 'group'. Each group was identified by a number, allotted from a register in which were recorded certain details concerning the accession:

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Date of Acquisition</th>
<th>Author or Catchword</th>
<th>Title or Description</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Number of Volumes or Packages</th>
<th>Binding</th>
<th>Statistical Total</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>How Acquired</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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Individual items (or 'pieces'), pictorial material (engravings, etchings, photographs) and maps were treated similarly, each accession being identified by a number and each type being recorded in a separate register. These registers, distinguished as 'A', 'B' and 'C' respectively, provided for entries in a form similar to those set out above, with appropriate variations in the headings for pictorial material (Name of photographer, Source, How acquired, Owner of

An Accession Continuation Card allowed additions to be made to any one of the existing accessions. This was a very necessary provision, particularly in the case of departmental records, where portions of a series are often transferred as they pass out of current use. The original connection between such fragments — important to the user as well as to the archivist — would be demonstrated by the use of a common accession number.

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A number of finding-aids were also prepared. Chief among these is the Catalogue. This system covers all categories of accessioned material, Groups, Pieces ('A'), Pictorial Material ('B') and Maps ('C'); the subject headings are naturally diverse, and include some in the form of questions — based presumably on inquiries made previously by members of the public. Certain important or well-known printed sources were also included. Items are identified on the cards either
Library rules for cross-referencing have been adopted. A series of 'Research Notes' has been compiled by the archivist; this consists of a record of information discovered in response to certain inquiries and, where applicable, references to this information is incorporated in the catalogue entries. The preparation of certain other lists and indexes was forced on the Archives Department by the frequency of certain types of inquiries; this category includes a 'Shipping Index' which covers the period 1836 to 1900 and relates to the arrival of overseas shipping, a list of ships arriving at Port Adelaide from all quarters between 1900 and 1918, and an Index to Pioneers which comprises the names of all people who arrived in the colony between July 1836 and December 1846.

This system seems to owe little to practices followed elsewhere. Its chief purpose seems to be to establish control over accessions and to divide them into categories based on type (pictorial material, maps, etc.) or quantity ('Pieces' or 'Groups'). Thus a run of dockets from a department would be entered as an accession in the 'Group' register, while a single docket from the same source would go in the 'Piece' register A. There is every need to keep a record of accessions, but why it is necessary that they should be classified in this fashion is not clear, nor does it seem helpful to use as a means of distinction the term 'piece' (which is indefinite) or the term 'group' (which is used in other archive institutions for quite a different purpose, and to denote quite a different form of classification). Unless accession order can be taken as the final
order, accessioning must be regarded as only the first of two stages. Many departmental archives are transferred piecemeal and out of sequence, arriving at the repository not in the order in which they were created, but in the order in which they have fallen out of active use. Whether they arrive by single 'pieces' or as a 'group' is of little practical consequence. The main task of the archivist is to classify them by series, to reconstruct the original order within each and then to relate one series to another by reference to their administrative origins. This can be done without reference to the category of accession (Piece, group, A, B or C) to which they belong; for departmental archives at least, this classification of accessions by reference to anything except their administrative connections must remain not only a preliminary, but an irrelevant preliminary.

Why was such an unusual system adopted? The only answer which seems possible is that it began as an expedient and has ended as a tradition. Henderson's Report did not refer to the methods of classification and description which were used to administer archives in Western Europe. When the first accessions began to arrive in the Archives Department from official and private sources, the vacuum had to be filled. What would be simpler or more natural than to begin to register the accessions individually and to class them by type; or, for that matter, to make special provisions for the larger and more voluminous acquisitions? It seems clear enough that the originators of the system foresaw nothing more elaborate than an endless
succession of acquisitions, some to be added to accessions already in custody, others to be registered as something new. As with the Report, the system betrays no recognition of the peculiarly 'organic' structure of a body of archives, a structure which is to be preserved or (more likely) reconstructed by the archivist. No machinery is provided to reconstruct the original order of a series which has been received in fragments, nor to relate one series to another. Perhaps in the case of private archives these requirements are not as important or as practical a preparation as they are in the case of archives whose growth has been more formally controlled and which has reflected, with great sensitivity, the influence of both internal and external pressures. It may well be that for every form of holding except those which derive from the public departments, the system, unorthodox as it is, functions well enough. But it can never be regarded as adequate for the treatment of official archives.

Nevertheless, the South Australian achievement was the most considerable of the period, far outweighing in significance what was accomplished elsewhere. Thus, looking back from more recent times, it is easy to see that the scale and, indeed, the direction of development in archive administration before 1939 did not hold promise for the future. Had the care of departmental archives become a matter of official concern, as forming an aspect of efficient administration, then quite possibly the problems of selection, or arrangement and description, would have been examined systematically and realistically well before 1939. As it was nearly all that was done in this respect
20.

after Federation was inspired by a desire to serve historical scholarship and this, for reasons which still await investigation, was simply not a force potent enough to work the changes that were required if the records massed in departments were to receive their due.

When, in the wartime Commonwealth, forceful and urgent considerations imparted a new interest in the well-being of departmental records in all phases of their career, earlier experience offered nothing positive to build on. Instead, first the War Archives Committee and then later the Commonwealth Archives Committee had to make a new beginning. In the history of this development lies the setting of the problems with which this inquiry is chiefly concerned.

Half way through 1942 a Committee met in Canberra to discuss the preservation of Federal records relating to the second World War. The initiative, we are told, "came from the then Prime Minister, John Curtin, who was anxious that the destruction of departmental records which had occurred during and after the first World War should be avoided and the way opened (in due course) for the creation of "a national archives system". This was new and important work, a task which marked a great departure from the attitudes of the past, and which called for "special experience and the study of senior officers". Accordingly, a small committee was established "to lay down certain broad principles which departments should be requested to observe and to maintain a general supervision over this work." The War Archives Committee began operations in July 1942 and was at once confronted by a number of problems.

Departmental regulations and conventions, lack of storage space, and the consequences of changes in the Administrative Arrangements were all active agents in the destruction and dispersal of valuable papers. Most departments were barely interested in the fate of

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2. Ibid., p.176.
their older records; a few made some provision for them, while papers relating to the first World War were (in theory at least) deposited with the Australian War Memorial. Quite clearly the Committee would be successful in its task of preserving more recent war records only insofar as it was able to institute some systematic means of dealing with the older papers of departments and to offer some form of shelter for those records which were to be permanently preserved.

To meet this situation, the War Archives Committee prepared a simple plan of action. Two so-called Archival Authorities were to be appointed. One, the Australian War Memorial, would be charged with administering the archives of the departments of Defence, Army, Air, Navy, Repatriation and Home Security, together with those of the War Service Homes Commission. The other, the Commonwealth National Library, was to take charge of the archives created by the remainder. The selection of records for permanent preservation was to be put on a more systematic footing by the use of what amounted to schedules indicating which classes of records might be destroyed and which must be kept. Until these arrangements should be put into effect, departments were to be instructed to proceed with special care in selecting records for destruction and to seek the advice of the appropriate Archival Authority. These proposals depended, in turn, on three requirements being met. In the first place there would be need for both of the Archival Authorities to offer expert guidance to the departments, and this would mean the acquisition of special staff. Then, once the process of examining records began,
some provision must be made for their safe storage until arrangements could be made for their final custody. Finally, as the Committee observed, any attempt to preserve Commonwealth records would be useless "without steps being (afterwards) taken properly to classify, list and permanently maintain the records so preserved. This is not the work of historians (whose task is to study the records and to pursue special inquiries into the historical field) but of archivists, who have to keep, organize, and supply the records for the historian or other research workers to study." At the end of 1942, a report along these lines was submitted to the Prime Minister, approved, and on 26 February 1943 was circulated to all Commonwealth Departments, together with a short statement of the procedures to be followed:

(a) Each department shall have, as at present, complete responsibility for deciding how long it wishes to retain its records.

(b) When it considers they are no longer of use to it, and desires to discard or destroy them, it shall notify an archival authority.

(c) The selection of the records shall then be made, as now, by officers of the department, but with the help of an archival authority.

(d) No records (except for those held under an obligation to destroy them, if so directed) may be destroyed except under the signature of the appropriate archival authority, confirmed by the War Archives Committee.

Until special staff could be recruited and acquire some experience, much in the selection of records for destruction would depend on the

3. Ibid., p.181.

4. Ibid., p.182.
departmental officers themselves. To assist them and to secure some uniformity of action and outlook, a circular entitled "Preservation of War Records (notes for the guidance of departmental officers)" was sent to all departments at the beginning of 1944. After summarizing the information and rules already current, the circular went on to outline some of the considerations which had to be borne in mind when estimating the value of records. Shortly afterwards one archives officer was appointed for each Archival Authority, and at about the same time the War Archives Committee began negotiations to acquire accommodation for the permanent material. By the end of the war, the outlines of the 'archives system' were apparent.

With the return of peace-time conditions, however, the central problem - that of preserving valuable records relating to the war - assumed a greater scale and urgency. "The termination of the war, causing as it will the cessation of wartime controls and activities, raises the problem of safe and effective disposal of the records compiled by the authorities concerned. While in some cases, such records will pass into the record system of the controlling department, in many cases, they will cease to have any direct importance in the transaction of current business.

The existence of large quantities of records, no longer subject to the control of routine filing treatment, is likely to cause severe strain on the resources of the departments with which the terminated authorities were associated. Under such conditions there is grave danger of loss or disarrangement of records which may be of extreme
importance to the War Historians and others." 5.

And peace brought another problem. The War Archives Committee had been established to secure the conservation of records relating to the Second World War, and however widely this term of reference might be construed so that the records created between 1918 and 1939 might be brought within its scope, the fact remained that records created after 1945 would less and less frequently fall into the prescribed category. If the government wished the measures now being devised to apply to the departmental records of the future, then, as Dr. Bean pointed out at the time, it would be necessary for new instructions to be issued to departments and new authority conferred on the War Archives Committee and its Archival Authorities. This was done in June 1946. The name of the Committee was altered to the Commonwealth Archives Committee and its functions enlarged as follows:

To study archival principles and practices and to submit recommendations for the establishment when circumstances permit, of a permanent archival system for the Commonwealth.

Pending the establishment of such a system -

To advise the Government on general questions of collection and preservation of records, for the collection or preservation of which adequate steps are not being taken by a Commonwealth Authority.

To formulate proposals for the preservation of records and documents of Commonwealth Departments, and to lay down broad principles to be observed in respect thereto by Commonwealth Departments and provisional archival authorities.


The machinery thus established functioned almost unchanged for another six years, during which time the Archives Committee not only supervised the working of what were considered to be provisional arrangements but also devoted a portion of its time to considering some of the questions which arose in connection with planning and equipping a permanent 'archives system' for the Commonwealth.

Work on the selection of records for permanent preservation had begun the year before, when the appointment of special archives officers to the staff of the Australian War Memorial and the Commonwealth National Library had permitted both of these Archival Authorities to begin to grapple with the problems involved. The method favoured by both was a Schedule in which were listed the various classes into which the records of the department or other agency could be divided according to their value for administrative and research purposes. Alongside each class was indicated the period for which records of this category should be retained. One of these Schedules prepared by the archives officers of the Commonwealth National Library was an unusually elaborate affair, brought about because in this case it was found to be impossible to define classes of records in detail. "It has, therefore" ran the Introduction, "been necessary to describe classes of records in general terms only and to rely on the judgement and experience of the officers concerned to treat the actual files according to the principles laid down.

To ensure that these principles are fully understood and at the same time to link the actual classes of records with Departmental
organization as closely as possible, ... the Schedule has been included in the Archival Summary and Guide." 7. The contents of this booklet included not only a schedule of the classes of records to be destroyed or preserved, but also a description of the organisation and functions of the department, a statement of the motives which lie behind the choice of records for preservation or destruction, and some remarks on the nature of the records created by the various branches of the department. The experiment was an interesting one, but it did not set the pattern for the future since the need to depend on a remote supervision of departmental activities was a temporary problem and one which would disappear with the appointment of officers specially qualified to conduct business of this sort.

The five other Schedules drawn up by the Archives Division of the Commonwealth National Library, the thirty-four destructions and the twenty-eight transfers of material to archive custody which were arranged by the same body 8. were all directed at the selection of valuable papers firstly from among the records no longer required by departments and ultimately (as schedules came into operation) at the systematic selection of valuable material from the records of the future. But the publication in the United States of a Task Force Report on Records Management 9. which had been prepared for the


Commission on Organisation of the Executive Branch of the Government, drew attention (or rather, according to the First Annual Report of the Commonwealth Archives Committee, re-directed attention) to another problem. "Although," in the words of that Report, "liaison with departments had been established and administrative procedures arranged for disposal of records, costly space in departments was increasingly occupied by dead or semi-current records and other storage was being leased for them. By 1949 the pressure on city office accommodation had become a serious embarrassment." What was to be done about the great volume of semi-current material still in departments - material which was still too active to be eligible for disposal, but not consulted as frequently as the records currently being created by the departmental registries and therefore needlessly occupying costly office space in city areas?

To discover such material, to arrange for its removal to cheaper forms of bulk storage, its maintenance and its production should current business demand its return to the department, meant not only additions to existing machinery but also more prolonged investigations into how and when records were created and consulted and above all into the rates at which they accrued. Some inquiries of the sort had already been attempted in 1946, when a series of questionnaires sent to the departments had produced only meagre results. Now, in 1949, this method was set aside in favour of a direct survey of each

department by specially appointed officers. In April it was announced by the Public Service Board that (in conjunction with the Archival Authorities) a procedure had been established for the systematic inspection and disposal of old departmental records. Advisory Committees were established in each state and provided the means whereby a representative of the Public Service Inspector, of the Archival Authority and of the department concerned could examine the records of each department and make recommendations to the Permanent Head on

(a) The existing records which should be destroyed, transferred to an Archival Authority or transferred to a central repository outside the high rental costs of the city.

(b) The elimination or modification of records, if necessary, to avoid duplication.

(c) Any other matters calculated to reduce the volume of records held by the departments.

These new arrangements meant that the provisional system was laying down useful and extensive foundations for the permanent system that was to come. The operations of creating, storing and selecting records were now all matters under official review and the methods by which this might be applied were the subject of much consideration during the five or six years which followed. But what was to happen to the records whose origins had been presided over and whose future had been so carefully marked out, once they arrived in the archives repository? How were their staffs to be trained? Above all, by what means were the records to be classified and made available for official and private research? This was the other side of the task which faced the Archives Committee if it were truly to lay the
foundations of a comprehensive scheme for the administration of Commonwealth archives. A small sub-committee had been formed at the meeting of the Archives Committee held on 17 June 1947 and this sub-committee had been charged with carrying through an extensive programme of research. The programme adopted covered not only the essential aspects of archive administration with reference to practices elsewhere, but also the appraisal, disposal and transfer of records from departments and even went on to consider the construction and organisation of an archives institution. The findings, in other words, would provide a blueprint for the creation of that 'complete archives system' towards which the Committee had been working since the middle of 1942. In the event, little seems to have materialised. At the beginning of 1948, the research officer of the sub-committee submitted a lengthy report on the training of archives officers, and this was considered at the next two meetings of the Archives Committee. Certain proposals concerning staffing were taken up, but the fundamental question of the character of the training which archivists were to receive was to all intents set aside and remains an open question to-day. With this report, traces of the activities of the sub-committee fade away and for reasons which are not apparent, the programme of research does not seem to have been proceeded with. As far as the selection and maintenance of semi-current records were concerned, the failure to implement the original scheme of research was not a great setback; these were the very problems which had to be faced every day and in connection with which almost all the resources of the Archival

Authorities were deployed. But for the development of the methods to be followed in accessioning, classifying, describing and repairing the records once received in an archive repository, for the more traditional spheres of archive administration, as well as for the wider issues of training and organisation, the failure to proceed with the lines of inquiry set before the sub-committee closed off the only avenue through which worthwhile progress in these spheres might have been achieved by the Archives Committee.

By the time the first Conference of Commonwealth and State Archival Authorities was held in June 1949, the Commonwealth was feeling its way satisfactorily enough through the problems associated with the disposal of records, and was just embarking on a programme to provide more adequately for the administration of semi-current records. It had little to offer by way of experience or theory in the traditional spheres of archive administration.

Slender resources had been diverted from the selection and safeguarding of material in departments to the treatment of a consignment of archives received from the administration of the Territory of Papua. From this limited experience, the two Archival Authorities had drawn up a number of "Recommendations for Archival Procedure." These, however, had been as much concerned with establishing vehicles for the transfer of records from departments as with the methods of...

administration to be followed in the repository; moreover, in neither sphere were the proposals anything but rudimentary and tentative. The agenda of the Conference was a wide one, wider, indeed, than would have been probable had the Conference been held before the War. But circumstances made the likelihood of any worthwhile examination of the more technical aspects of archive administration extremely remote.

The Conference was, as its chairman pointed out, the successor to the Conference of Librarians held in Adelaide in 1940. Many who had attended there were now present in Canberra, and some of the matters discussed previously were again on the agenda. There was no reason to suppose that the position or attitude in the States had altered substantially from what they had been nearly ten years before. Tasmania, as a result of interest in both academic and administrative quarters, had acquired a Public Records Act, but had not acquired the organisation to support it. Since 1943, when the Act had been passed, the archives already in custody (mainly those of the Chief Secretary's Department and its predecessors) had been administered by an officer of the Chief Secretary's Department, as one among many duties. No worthwhile transfers of archives were made. In New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia the state libraries continued to act as repositories for such departmental records as

13. An Act to provide for the disposal of Public Records in certain cases. No. 2 of 1943.

offered, while the South Australian Archives Department followed the same course which had been mapped out for thirty years. Nowhere was there any sign that the States shared the aim of the Commonwealth to create a comprehensive archives system and consequently few of the problems set by the latter had become pressing matters. Dr. C. E. W. Bean, in opening the Conference, set out what was in fact the standpoint of the Commonwealth. "When first asked by Mr. Curtin to help in the Archives work," he remarked, "I ... was inclined to look upon the service of history and other learned research as the only object of the work. But the more I see of archival work the more I have come to realise that the archivists have also an immensely important service to perform for the departments of government - providing, as it were, the final shelf in the whole government system of records." This was indeed the proper note to sound at a Conference which met in the shadow of the Task Force Report on Records Management and the agenda was well designed to examine every aspect of the administration of departmental records, from their creation in the department, through their selection for preservation to their classification and general maintenance in the repository. Certain aspects of these operations were not new to many members of the Conference; one paper at Adelaide in 1940 had touched on some fundamental elements. But they had never before been taken as a whole and in sequence; nor had there been before (as there was now) some experience at least in dealing with the intractable bulk of departmental records. Unfortunately, however, the Conference lasted only two days, meeting on the morning of the 20 June, adjourning to allow a Working Committee to study and report on the agenda, and meeting again on the afternoon
of the 21st, to consider the proposals of the Working Committee. In the circumstances, little useful could be accomplished. The Conference approved a number of resolutions concerning the training of archivists, the desirability of surveying all the public records in Australia, methods of reproducing archives, and the principles to be observed where archives were of common interest to Commonwealth and State Archival Authorities. None were conclusive and all avoided the awkward questions of ways and means. So-called technical matters, which included such fundamental issues as definitions and terminology, the problems set by such special classes of records as the papers of Ministers, Trade Unions and Public Utilities, the methods of appraising records for preservation or destruction, the extent of the responsibility of archivists for the ways in which records were being created in departments, buildings and equipment, the preservation and repair of records, their accessioning and arrangement, the provision of a reference service - these matters, comprising almost everything on which an archives system depends, were set aside for consideration at some future conference. Given the fact that few of the participants had either the necessary qualifications or experience to examine such questions, and that in any case the astonishingly short amount of time available could only have led to an unsatisfactory conclusion, the Working Committee was right to make the recommendation which it did. Nevertheless, the virtual removal of so many practical issues from the agenda robbed the proceedings of the Conference of whatever substance they might have possessed.

Five more years were to elapse before both traditional and novel
aspects of archive administration in Australia were finally examined by archivists and departmental officers gathered in Canberra from all parts of the Commonwealth.

The conference on technical matters finally took place in 1954, at the end of a visit to Australia by Dr. T.K. Schellenberg, then Director of Archival Management at the National Archives, Washington. At intervals between 1942 and 1949, one member or another of the Archives Committee had suggested that an expert on archive administration should be brought to Australia to lecture and advise not only on behalf of the Federal Government but for the benefit of the Commonwealth as a whole. The theme was taken up again at the 1949 Conference, with a motion:

That the Commonwealth Government be asked to include in its proposals to the United States Government for the use of Fullbright (sic) Funds under Lend-Lease in Australia one invitation for a visit to Australia by a prominent United States authority on archival administration and training, his services to be available to the Commonwealth or State Governments for advice on such aspects of archival administration and training as they desire, and possibly to give short courses of training whilst here."

Negotiations began shortly afterwards, but it was not until the beginning of 1954 that Dr. Schellenberg began a series of visits to libraries and archive institutions, first in the state capitals and then, finally, in Canberra. There, in July, archivists and departmental

record-officers, including representatives from every state in the Commonwealth, met to begin a series of meetings in the course of which every aspect of the administration of departmental records was discussed.

Between 1949 and 1954, the energies of the Commonwealth archive authorities had been largely concerned firstly in creating machinery for the storage of departmental records in bulk, as well as for the selection of valuable papers, and then in putting the machinery into operation. An appendix to the first Annual Report of the Commonwealth Archives Committee recorded that up to the middle of 1952, no less than one hundred and sixty-two disposal schedules had been issued and nearly five hundred transfers of records had been received into archival custody. In addition, over thirty-two thousand files from the semi-current records now held in storage were either searched or issued in response to departmental requests. Activities such as these possessed the momentum created by urgency, and the Commonwealth authorities were willing to postpone, for the moment, any development of other and more traditional side of the archivists' work. As late as the middle of 1952, that same Annual Report could remark, "The arranging and describing of present and future accessions for administrative and scholarly research purposes is the heaviest future commitment, and requires the development of highly skilled professional techniques."

16. A number of others were present, including members of the Australian National University and the Commonwealth National Library.
Towards the end of 1950, consideration had been given to the types of descriptive aid best suited to the resources of the Archives Division and although no decision appears to have been reached the American Preliminary Inventory, which described archives at the level of the series, had clearly gained ground over the more established variety of inventory or list which dealt with each item within the series. For another three years, however, the existing systems of administration within the repository were limited to recording the arrival and shelving of each consignment of archives, with a view to assisting the production of items required for reference purposes. Not until the end of 1953 did the Archives Division begin to consider the development of ways and means to consolidate, classify and describe the separate but often related accessions which now were beginning to fill the repository. In November of that year there appeared what was to have been the first of a series of Staff Information Papers. This document not only introduced new methods of accessioning, but also set out certain ultimate aims and intentions of which these new methods formed only the first stage. "All archives in the custody of the Division, " the Paper announced, " will be allocated to one and one only Archive Group which, itself, consists of all the archives (in custody) of an "Administration which was an organic whole, complete in itself, capable of dealing independently, without any added or external authority, with every side of any business which could normally be presented to it, " ... All archives within an Archive Group ... will

be maintained in the series in which they were originally registered, (or otherwise gathered), or, if they have become disarranged, the original series will be reconstructed as far as possible ..." In adopting these principles the Paper did no more than follow a widely accepted theory of archive arrangement. Where an element of novelty lay was in the unfortunate supposition that the short and confused history of Commonwealth administration would make the application of these general principles peculiarly difficult.

"The history of Commonwealth administration," one paragraph ran, "is short, which means that there are few of the closed Archives Groups on which classical theory depended to achieve final arrangement, accurate descriptive guides and inventories, and permanent reference code numbers." Since numerous Departments, Boards and Commissions which had created archives of their own had been created and abolished before 1953, this statement only makes sense if it be taken to infer that archives are to be classified not according to such long-dead instrumentalities as may have brought them into being, but according to the agency by whom they had been transferred to the repository. Thus, for example, although the archives transferred by Department A might include many which had originated in Departments B, C and D, transferred from one department to another in the course of the confused administrative history of the Commonwealth to which the Staff Information Paper referred, all these archives would be classified as part of the Archive Group 'Department A', with the original order of the fragments from B, C and D being carefully preserved. This was a radical misunderstanding of accepted practices which had depended on distinctions (some of which are quoted in this Paper) being drawn between the
various ways in which records might be transmitted from one department to another.

But in all fairness, it must be said that the States were faring no better and that the *Staff Information Paper* no more than anticipated the uncertainty which was so evident among the majority of participants when the question of arrangement was discussed at the 1954 Seminar. There was, in fact, little likelihood of advice on this or related problems from any of the States. There, the most notable event since the Conference of 1949 had been the appointment of the first full-time archivist to the Tasmanian State Library, and the creation of an Archives Section within the Public Library of New South Wales. But neither in these institutions nor in the Archives Departments in Western Australia and South Australia were archives classified or described in any but the most elementary way. It was not that their time, like that of the Commonwealth, had been largely taken up with attending to the problems of storing semi-current departmental records or of devising means for selecting valuable papers from among the records which departments wished to discard. It was simply that resources did not allow the arrangement of archives to proceed much beyond the patterns which they followed at the time of transfer; nor did they permit the preparation of anything but the simplest forms of descriptive aid. The formation of Archive Groups and their subdivision into series; the determination of which descriptive aids were most suitable to the character and volume of the material in question, and their consistent preparation - these were all activities which were as unfamiliar to the States as they were to the Commonwealth. The
visit of Dr. Schellenberg and the Canberra seminar, then, may fairly be taken as the first occasion on which government archivists in Australia had been called upon to consider systematically and critically the practices of their calling, as they related to departmental archives.

Proceedings of the conference were divided into two parts with an Archives Management Seminar coming first and being followed by one on the management of records in departments. The programme of the former took up all the points shelved in 1949 and included the selection of material for permanent preservation, the accessioning of archives, their classification and description, the provision of reference services, the compiling of administrative history, the organisation of staff for archives work, the conservation of archives, legislation and co-operation between archive institutions. Of these, however, only the discussions on the classification and description are relevant to the present inquiry.

The major questions of method which were raised in the eleven points set down for discussion may be brought under two headings; firstly, the desirability or otherwise of retaining the original order of the archives and secondly, the classification of archives. On the first matter, the answer was made to depend on the nature of the archives involved. Archives whose arrangement in no way reflected the organisation of the department which created them could, it was

18. The details which follow are taken from Proceedings of the Archives Management Seminar. (Canberra, November 1955) and are to be found under the headings Arrangement and Description.
felt, be re-arranged by whatever method seemed most likely to suit research needs. With registry records, however, most of the delegates felt that archivists should not attempt any re-arrangement by reference to subject-matter in place of the system by which the material had been controlled originally, although one or more considered that some such re-arrangement might usefully be effected by the department itself when the records passed out of current use.

The classing of archives first by Groups and then by series was seen as presenting a number of problems all of which had their origin in the changing patterns along which records had been assembled over the years. To apply the notion of the Group, and to classify the series accordingly, it seemed necessary to the Conference to have had a substantial degree of stability in the machinery of government by which the records had been created. The history of the Commonwealth Department of External Affairs was cited as an example of the difficulties which could be encountered as a result of the changes in Administrative Arrangements. In this case, the Department began in 1901 as the Department of External Affairs; sixteen years later it was abolished, and its functions and records divided between the Prime Minister's Department and the Department of Home and Territories. Then in 1921 it re-appeared as a semi-autonomous division of the latter, and finally emerged again as an independent Department in 1932. In the meantime (though this was not stated) the records transferred to Home and Territories had also acquired a distinctive history of their own through other changes in the Administrative Arrangements. It is easy to see how the records inherited and added to by External
Affairs and now transferred by that department might, at first sight, seem to possess a variety of administrative allegiances. If traditional practices decreed that these records should now be classified by Group, to which department could they be attributed?

Fault was also found with the definition of a Group as supplied by Jenkinson:

the Archives resulting from the work of an Administration which was an organic whole, complete in itself, capable of dealing independently, without any added or external authority, with every side of any business which could normally be presented to it. 19.

If Groups were to be based on agencies, something less limiting in its requirements would have to be found. One suggestion was that the products of an individual registry should be regarded as a Group. Another view put forward was that Groups might very well be based on the functions discharged by administrative government, rather than the structure of the machinery by which they were carried out. Thus, for example, all the archives relating to 'Immigration' or 'External Affairs' would be brought together to form single groups without reference, in the first instance, to the administrative bodies which created them. 20.


20. Such a scheme was in fact attempted by the Commonwealth National Library Archives Division, which brought into one group all of the records relating to the Public Works function of the Commonwealth; but the result has not been regarded as a success and no further operations of a like kind are contemplated.
A number of replies to these remarks suggest themselves at once. If it is accepted that the task of the archivist is to preserve the original structure of his records (and none of the archivists present at Canberra in 1954 would have quarrelled with such an assumption) then this must depend on the structure of the Administrative Arrangements under which the records were created. Only if these precepts are ignored or misunderstood, only if provenance is interpreted literally to mean always the place or department from which the archives have been transferred to the repository, may the archives of long-dead departments seem to present problems of classification. Moreover, however peculiar or inappropriate the structure of Government may appear to later eyes, the function of the archivist is not to rationalise or to improve but to reconstruct the records according to the pattern imposed on them by the operation of the contemporary administrative organisation. This procedure alone can preserve whatever administrative connections the various bodies of records acquired, since this alone can reflect the governmental machine of the day at work. The doubts as to the applicability of Jenkinson's definition of the Archive Group seem to be based more on a misreading of the original than on any inherent unsuitability. Jenkinson does not limit the laws of Archive Groups to those departments which occupy a completely independent position, since quite obviously no department is ever in such a position. The extent of independence is always a purely relative matter, and the degree of relativity was set out succinctly in the definition which Jenkinson provided. Nor can the suggestion be countenanced that the Archive Group in Australia should be based on the product of a registry. Such a scheme may be perfectly suitable
for the conditions in the government departments of Western Europe, but in Australia, the registries simply do not control all the records within departments, nor do they consistently employ any one variety of system for the control of all or part of their records.

The discussion on the types of descriptive aids required was more conclusive but less discriminating. It was conclusive insofar as the Seminar decided that where Australian departmental archives were concerned, the American preliminary inventory was to be the chief form of descriptive aid, while the descriptive list was to be employed as a subsidiary means and at a later stage. The preliminary inventory was to be based (rather surprisingly) on the Group and, like its American prototype, to describe archives only at the level of the series. Yet the discussion was also undiscriminating. It devoted some time to considering various aspects of the descriptive aids (in particular the preliminary inventories) as they were at present constituted; in particular the questions of terminology, the degree to which comment on the value of records should be supplied and the extent of the administrative history which should be offered were all brought under review. But on no occasion was there any suggestion that the information supplied in these aids might require modification to suit the character and volume of Australian departmental records, or any attempt to assess the resources available to compile such aids. 21.

21. The same is true also of the scheme (based on the use of the Preliminary Inventory) to prepare a Guide to Pre-Federation Archives - a scheme which was adopted by the Conference but which has made little progress to date.
There appeared to be little doubt in the minds of many present at Canberra that the greatest burdens to be borne by government archivists in Australia were those imposed by a constantly changing structure of government in colony, state and Commonwealth. Here, it seemed, were the circumstances which created a great obstacle to the application of accepted theories of archive administration; which made obscure the relevance of such notions as that of the traditional Archive Group, and which raised difficulties in the classification of series by reference to their administrative origins. It was a disconcerting experience to receive from the relatively small number of present-day departments a vast inheritance of records, some quite clearly the creation of contemporary instrumentalities but others equally clearly the work of less familiar departments and offices. To archivists not only uncertain of the distinctions to be drawn between the place where an archive originated and the place from which it was transferred, but also aware of the need to preserve the order in which archives were received, such a confused or unstable administrative background seemed to preclude the use of accepted notions of classification. The most urgent task for the future, so it appeared, would be to devise new criteria for the arrangement of archives. Yet in fact nothing could have been further from the mark. Much of the accepted theory of archive administration was founded on material which was itself the product of institutions in a process of evolution, and the nature of the changes which occur in administrative machinery - the creation and abolition of some instrumentalities, the growth and decline of others, the development of new channels of communication - were as apparent then as they are now. It is true
that the scale of change has increased here in Australia just as it has in the United Kingdom and elsewhere; but this is all that has happened and it means nothing beyond the fact that modern Archive Groups will often be smaller, certainly more numerous, probably more fragmentary and frequently more inter-related than those produced by older patterns of administrative organisation. It was unfortunate that so much concern should have been felt over the definition of archive groups and so little time spent in examining the character of their contents, for in this way, the most novel issue of all went unrecognised.

The fact that the records transferred by one of the present-day departments might carry control-marks imposed by others was not evidence of any difficulty in applying traditional methods of archive classification, but rather provided a clue to the existence of an entirely different order of problem. An apparent movement of papers between one body of records and another, and the presence of systems designed to mould the structure of each body of papers according to a pre-determined pattern, lend a new importance not only to the composition of the administrative machinery which created our modern departmental archives, but also to the means by which the archives were assembled and controlled. Each of these factors has an obvious voice in determining the classification of archives, but each has also a less obvious but equally important influence on their description.

The decade which followed the end of the war has been the most
decisive period for the development of an interest in the administration of departmental records. It was a period in which a new force found expression through a new representative. Since 1945, archive administration has become regarded as one part or stage in a larger, more comprehensive scheme for the administration of departmental records at all stages of their career, and this new position has offered the best guarantee that arrangements for the custody and administration of archives will continue to enjoy the benefits of official approval in the future. The Commonwealth, first and foremost, thought in terms of a complete archives system, but the urgency of some aspects—in particular those connected with the storage and selection of records still in departments—caused a diversion of talent and resources from the examination of problems connected with the more traditional pursuits of classifying and describing these records once they have been lodged in an archives repository. Not until 1952 was the staff of the Commonwealth Archives Division able to return to the problems which would, in the long run, affect them most closely of all, and by the middle of 1954, when the second Conference was held, the conclusions which had been reached on these matters were tentative to say the least. Nor were the States in a position to make good the deficiency, despite the fact that they, unlike the Commonwealth, began operations with the more traditional activities and only very recently had begun to graft on to these the additional measures required for the administration of records while they were still in departmental custody. 22.

22. For a brief statement of the position in New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania, see Proceedings of the Archives Management Seminar (Canberra, 1955) Appendices 2, 3 and 4.
Although the decade ended with a wider vision than had ever existed before, only uneven progress had been made in turning the vision into reality. Something had been attempted and more was in train towards ensuring that the repositories would receive their full complement of archives. The great significance of the 1954 Conference is not to be seen in the concrete results which it achieved, for they were few, but for the fact that it demonstrated that the new generation of government archivists in Australia had much to learn concerning the history and character of their charges. Without this insight, no soundly based suggestions could be put forward on such matters as the classification of archives and the provision of descriptive aids. Without these suggestions, no satisfactory system of archive administration could evolve.
PART II

ARCHIVES IN THE MAKING
All but the very earliest Australian departmental records come from a period in which few public offices were without a special section - the registry - whose function it was to organise and maintain the official papers of the department. The identification, production and circulation of these papers were the objects of a well-defined routine, and the surviving registers, indexes, transmission books and blank cover registers as well as the dockets and files of papers themselves are all indications of the often quite elaborate methods which registries employed. If the analogy is not taken too far, it is useful to think of their apparatus as a mechanism, as a system of mutually adapted parts working together, in which the registration, indexing and filing of papers each had their appointed place. Most of the material now entering the various archive repositories or still lying dormant in cellars and attics was, at the time of its active career, marshalled and utilised by means of some such contrivance.

From one point of view, it is possible to regard all records created in this fashion as forming a single category, and insofar as this emphasises that an element of formality and system accompanied their accumulation, it is serviceable enough. But, while it is true that to a very great extent our departmental records are the creation of one form of registry or another, can it be said that all registry records are similar in character? If the nature (as distinct from the subject-matter) of one body of these records has been described,
will this description suffice for all bodies of such records? Does the history of record-keeping within public departments stretch out as a straight, if thickening, line of development, with nothing to distinguish the beginning from the end save the number of registries in operation? These are three ways of asking the same question, and the answer is of importance to all who are concerned with the records laid up by the past, whether their purpose is one of preservation or of official or private inquiry.

Even the most cursory examination of the records now preserved in repositories is sufficient to suggest what the answer will be. Some registries, it would seem, have been content with the simplest of schemes - perhaps no more than a series each of letters received and letters issued, together with a register recording the identity of each item. Others have been more ambitious, seeking less to control individual items than to classify their contents by means of files and intricate subject indexes. In some, more conservative or perhaps less hard pressed, practices have endured unchanged for more than fifty years. In others, the presence of card indexes and various mechanical devices suggests the intrusion (at some stage) of the business world, while elaborate schemes for the grouping of files reflect the influence of Dewey and the decimal system of control.

There is enough here to suggest that in Australia, at least, the record-keeping practices of public departments have a history of their own, and that each body of departmental records possesses a
distinctive character which lies not in the use of distinctive scripts or common form, but in the means by which the records have been marshalled and utilised for the conduct of departmental business.

The implications of this state of affairs are considerable for archivist and historian alike. Elucidation, reconstruction and description on the one hand; discovery and assessment of evidence on the other - both of these will depend (in varying degrees) on some familiarity not only with the methods of individual registries but also (because in this work comparison must be the principally) with the history of record-keeping practices as they have developed in registries over the years. It seems certain that neither the archivist (primarily) nor the historian (to a lesser extent) can avoid making some additions to their professional equipment. But the shape which these additions will take must depend almost entirely on what can be discovered of the ways in which records have been accumulated in the past. Without this information, neither the administration nor the use of the records can be adequately provided for. This is the justification for the survey which follows.

The simplest methods are usually found in the smallest offices. Where the volume of business is slight and correspondences can be easily remembered, little more is required than that letters received or sent should be adequately identified. For this purpose, it has usually been found sufficient (in Australian practice) to arrange the papers in two series, one of items received, the other of items sent, and within each of these series to maintain the papers
in the simple order of receipt or despatch. By way of refinement, it has become customary to register and to index each item within at least the inwards series.

At the beginning of this century, something of the sort can be seen in the organisation of correspondence records in the Lieutenant-Governor’s Office in Papua and in the Prime Minister’s Office; more recently it appears in the records of the Afforestation Branch of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior, and, in a far earlier period, traces of a similar procedure can be detected in the surviving records of the Police Magistrate at Port Phillip.

Example 1. Records of Prime Minister’s Office, 1904–1906.

Principal Elements in the System.
1) Arrangement of papers: Two series were maintained— one of papers received and the other (letter press copies) of papers sent. Within each series, items were maintained in chronological order of receipt or despatch; the order of papers received being confirmed by a system of numeration.

2) Register: Each folio is numbered and divided into the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Papers</th>
<th>Progressive Numbers</th>
<th>Subsequent Papers</th>
<th>Other Dept. No.</th>
<th>Date of Letter</th>
<th>Date of Registration</th>
<th>From Whom</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Referred to Whom</th>
<th>Referred When</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) and (b), in these columns were entered the registration numbers of related papers received previously or subsequently.
Example I (cont.)

iii) Index: Divided alphabetically. Entries were made by source (e.g. by the name of a department, of a private individual, etc.) and/or subject. The registration number(s) of paper(s) concerned is given alongside each entry in the index.

The System in operation.

Details concerning each item received were entered alongside the next available number in the register; at the same time, papers were stamped with the number by which they would henceforward be identified. Details of source and, perhaps, of subject-matter were recorded in the index. Papers would then be put away in their registered order.

Replies to letters in the inward series and other letters sent from the Office were prepared in duplicate - originals being despatched and copies being bound in a Letter Book. These papers were arranged in date order: their contents were indexed in much the same fashion as were those of papers received.

This system was simple and soundly based. It paid careful attention to the well-being of individual papers; each had an obvious place in the simple scheme of physical arrangement, and few demands were made on those who had to classify the records in this fashion. Only the indexing called for the exercise of initiative and judgement. But it was not even necessary that this latter
should be adequately done, for in the last analysis, the careful registration of each paper meant that a search through the register or letter-book would produce what was required.

A respect for individual papers and for their identity as components of an inwards or outwards series were the principal characteristics of record-keeping practices during the nineteenth century. But expressed in its simplest form, as is often the case in the record systems of small offices, it has a number of limitations. It makes few concessions to convenience. To trace the course of a particular transaction it might be necessary to move from one series to another half a dozen times in order to assemble the related papers; such a search might have to be conducted each time the particular correspondence came to life. Moreover, while the register and index each offered some assistance in tracing related papers within each series, no machinery existed which demonstrated the connection between papers in one series and those in another; in this case it was necessary to discover papers almost entirely by reference to the date of each letter.

Where the volume of business remains small, such methods are as adequate to-day as they were a hundred and twenty years ago at Port Phillip. But where the flow of letters through the registry is numbered not in hundreds but in thousands and tens of thousands a year, then such impediments to the rapid production of papers become less acceptable. It was only a matter of time before the papers relating to a particular transaction, once brought together, would be
kept permanently in this fashion; it also was only a matter of time before this arrangement was extended to include not only the papers of the inwards series (in which the development began) but also copies of the related replies in the outwards series. Sooner or later, too, the index would be developed as a flexible, independent instrument capable of providing a more subtle classification of subject-matter than could be achieved by the physical grouping of papers in subject-files. Characteristically, the nineteenth century registry clerks met the problems created by the rising tide of papers not by simplifying registry methods, or by seeking to control fully only selected papers, but by devising schemes which retained the elements of formal control over all the papers individually, and also allowed for elaborate classification of the papers both physically and by indexing.

By the middle of the last century, the correspondence conducted by some colonial departments — notably the Postal and the Lands Departments — had reached sizeable proportions. An increase in staff merely meant that more people knew less about the records as a whole; it also meant that, if the earliest form of record-keeping

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were not modified and made more convenient, more people would be engaged in collecting and re-distributing papers used in the conduct of departmental business. In fact by the time of Responsible Government, the registries of the larger colonial departments were adopting systems (or adapting earlier methods) which offered more subtle organisation of papers as well as more comprehensive arrangements for their control. The scheme employed in the New South Wales Surveyor-General's Office in 1857 illustrates the developments which had taken place:

The type of register being used in 1857 provided for the recording of certain information about letters, in order of their receipt. (See Plate 1). As each letter was received, it simply took the next available number in the column headed 'Progressive', and this number served as a permanent means of identification.

Once this had been established the following procedure was set in motion:

1. The date of registration, source of the letter, place from which it had been written, date of writing and a brief synopsis of its subject-matter were then entered alongside the appropriate number.

2. This account has been compiled from an examination of records held in the Mitchell Library, the Lands Department and the Intermediate Record Repository at Shear's Creek, Sydney.

3. If the letter received carried an identification number of its own, this was also entered in the 'From Whom' column. Vide entries 1726 to 1738 (Plate 1).
2. At this stage, attention moved to the index. Here, papers were classified according to source, and an entry made indicating the source and (very briefly) the subject-matter of the letter, together with its registration number. 4.

3. From the index a connection might be made with previous inwards letters dealing with the same piece of business and of these, the registration number of the most recent would be entered in the 'Papers' column of the register. Here, the practice followed prescribed that if the most recent previous paper were one of the current year, its 'progressive' number only would be given (e.g. the entry for 57/1726 on Plate 1); but if it were of any previous year, then year and 'progressive' number would be quoted (e.g. the entry for 57/1723 on Plate 1).

4. The inward letter was then stamped with its registration number, and the date of receipt - as were any enclosures or attachments. The number entered in the 'Papers' column was also frequently written on the face of the letter.

All but the last three columns of the register entry had now been completed; at this stage the letter (together with any supporting

4. There was no attempt to classify under broad subject-headings (e.g. Finance, Conferences). The 'D' section of the index was simply broken up thus: Da, De, Di, Do, Dr, Du, with special sections set aside for such prolific sources as the Deputy Surveyor-General, and other officials whose name or title began with 'D'. (This example is taken from the 1856 index, since the volumes for 1857 are missing. The similarity between the practice in 1856 and in 1860 - the next surviving index - is such as to suggest that the 1857 method was much as set out above).
papers was ready to be circulated for action.

5. Should it prove necessary to circulate papers beyond the Survey and Management of Crown Lands Branch, the fact was recorded in the 'Referred' column (see Plate 1). Thus paper 57/1724 was despatched to the Secretary for Lands and Public Works (i.e. to the Ministerial Office of the Department) on the 14th of February, and was the seventy-fifth communication so to be sent in 1857.

6. When a reply had been prepared on the basis of the memoranda and reports which had been endorsed on the original letter as it passed from clerk to clerk and from branch to branch, a copy of the reply was entered in one of three letter-books, depending on whether the reply were to a "Surveyor", or "Official" or "Private Individual". From the sequence in which these copies of replies were entered was derived the number which identified the outward letter, and which appeared on the fair copy despatched to the correspondent. Plate 2 illustrates a page from the "Officials" letter-book, and shows copies of two outward letters, numbers 98 and 99 of 1857. The registration number of the inward letter to which each was a reply appears in the top of the margin. Thus 57/98 is a reply to 57/1736, and in the 'Result of Application' column of the register entry for 57/1736 (see Plate 1), a note was made of the addressee, date of despatch and number of the reply.

7. Should another letter be received in continuation of a transaction, the registration number allotted to this new letter was recorded in the register entry for the previous inward letter, and was also placed alongside the text of the last outward letter. In the case of letter
57/1736, ( see Plate 1 ) the number of the newly received paper - 57/6101 - can be seen entered in the ' Result of Application ' column, and the same number appears alongside letter number 57/98 in the outward letter-book ( see Plate 2 ). To complete the chain of reference, 57/1736 would be quoted in the ' Papers ' column ( see Plate 1 ) of the register entry for 57/6101.

Not all letters which came into the Survey and Management Branch, however, received a formal reply by letter. A high proportion of the communications which came from the Ministerial Office of the Department, for example, were sent for a report under what was known as a ' Blank Cover '. Blank Covers were a device which facilitated the exchange of information between one office and another, and which sought to reduce the volume of clerical work which this could entail.

Formerly, when office A required the assistance of office B in conducting a particular piece of business, it was necessary to draft a statement which gave a synopsis of events to date, and which outlined the points on which advice or assistance was now required. This communication would be transmitted to office B where, in due course, a report would be written and sent, along with the original letter of inquiry, to office A. Such a procedure had at least two weaknesses. In the first place it was certainly a laborious and often a highly skilled task to frame an adequate appraisal of the situation for use by the other office. In the second, each proceeding of this sort added materially to the bulk of papers which were being accumulated on a particular file.
Transmitting rest of this appended section under pre-emptive right.

To the Honorable the Treasurer, to whom it appears that the latter should be forwarded.

For the Sovereign
signature: Mary Allman
3rd Augt. 1857

RespectingDeeds of 20 acres at Field River, Wis.

2/3 Blank Copy

The deed in respect of the settlement of land referred to in the letter of Mr. James Wadham has passed into the hands of Jeremiah Beale, and was forwarded from the Secretary to the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Melbourne for delivery to the Secretary, on the 2nd August, 1857. A receipt for the deed is noted in the register (Vol. 29, p. 281) and this receipt is to be found at the Treasury.

F. F. O. Secretary

12 Feb 1857
Under the Blank Cover system, however, office A would simply transmit to office B the paper or file of papers which documented the case in question, with the bottom right-hand corner of the top paper turned back, and endorsed "to ---, for Blank Cover report." Office B, in turn, would write its report on the matter in hand underneath this endorsement, and then return the paper or papers to office A.

An example of this procedure in operation is to be found in connection with letter 57/1723 (see Plate 1). Here, the letter is distinguished from other letters received by being shown as having come from James Whalan via the Treasurer, and the digest of its subject is preceded, it will be noted, by the symbol ' E.C. ' Once the report had been made in the Survey and Management Branch, the papers were returned to the Treasurer, - but not before a record had been made of the substance of the report. These records were kept in a special entry-book, much in the manner of copies of outward letters. From the sequence in which these entries were made was derived the number which identified the Blank Cover report (see Plate 3). Thus, the report made in reply to letter 57/1723 being the third entered in 1857, it took the number 57/3. An entry was then made in the

5. It appears that, in 1855, this method was restricted as far as the Surveyor-General's office was concerned to the transmission of correspondence to and from the Colonial Secretary's Department. By 1857, the practice had been extended to communications to and from other offices. Although the earliest Australian use of the method is to be found in the New South Wales Colonial Secretary's Department, it is one which can be found at a later date in most colonial administrations.
PLATE  4
BL. Gunn. In n.ind. 24.

1st pr. Encroachment by Capt. Hepple in the Hous
Mr. Eights to Bermain.

B.E. 51-120
51 12
51, 1516.
register (Plate 1) to show that the substance of the reply could be found in the 'M.B.C.' book under the number 57/3, and had been despatched on the 12th of February.

An examination of a typical file is useful as showing something of these record-keeping methods in operation. The file concerns an alleged encroachment on the road from Dapto to Berrima, and consists of six registered items, which will be treated in turn. To avoid repetition, it can be assumed that in each case, the inward letter went through the usual preliminaries of registration and indexing as set out above, and that each is supported by a completed entry in the register of inward letters.

Plate 4. 57/4234. This item records the receipt of a Blank Cover communication from the Secretary for Lands and Public Works, respecting an encroachment on the road from Dapto to Berrima. After having been registered (as inward letter no. 57/4234), and a report made as requested, the papers forwarded by the Secretary were returned to his Ministerial Office. The text of the report was recorded in the Blank Cover entry-book, and there the matter ended, as far as the Survey and Management Branch was concerned.

While, therefore, the register recorded the receipt of the papers from the Secretary as inwards letter no. 57/4234,

6. This might well stand for 'Miscellaneous Blank Cover' book, to distinguish it from another 'Blank Cover' book which was apparently kept more particularly for reports sent to the Ministerial Office of the Lands and Public Works Department.
PLATE 5
Drafts July 25th 1857

Mr. My Dear - Representing that Capt. Hopkins has encroached on his lands, that the same may be settled to prevent the breach of boundary.

I purchased off three lots of land adjoining the Berrima Road from Woolfsong, and at the line of road the mountain is not clearly defined. I most respectfully request you will be good enough to give directions to Mr. Surveyor Show to point out the line for my neighbour Captain Hopkins is erecting a fence along the road and I have led to think from the way he is going with his fence that he is greatly encroaching upon my land. I have therefore to be.

With much respect

Your most obedient Servt

William Henry Swan
there would be no trace of such an item amongst the departmental papers. To overcome this apparently undesirable state of affairs, a blank sheet of paper was taken, folded down the middle, and stamped with registration number and date of receipt, as would have been a normal inward letter. This sheet was then used to record certain information concerning the Blank Cover communication - its source, its subject-matter, and the number and date of the report made (in this case, B.C. 57/128, 1 May). Finally, the specially prepared sheet was filed away in numerical order with other inward papers.

Plate 5. 57/7661. On July 25th, the matter of the encroachment was raised again by another correspondent who wrote directly to the Survey and Management Branch from Dapto, requesting that a surveyor be sent to point out the correct boundaries.

N.B. (a) that according to custom, the entry which had been made in the 'Nature of Application and Representation' column of the register (see Plate 1) was written at the head of the text, (b) the endorsement - written obliquely by the chief clerk across the text - "Mr. McL 27 ", instructing that the letter should be sent to A.G. McLean (Chief Draftsman) and dating it on the 27th of July, (c) that the registration number of this letter was written on the face of the previous inward paper (see Plate 4).
Mr. Surveyor General to the Surveyor General.

Respecting Captain Hopkins' encroachment on the road leading from Dapto to Nowra—superintendence.

Narooma

September 3, 1857.

With reference to your letter No. 9 of the 18th ultimo referring to the report submitted to your honorable authority in a letter of the 1st inst. from the Secretary for Lands and Public Works, Captain Hopkins having visited and reported about the encroachment made by him in his plan of No. 2, 625, on land in the road leading from Dapto to Narooma—

(1) In reply to the latter, to state that a line of Mr. Hopkins' on the ground was made a feature to which the surveyor should be made, viz., that it be included in the old track.

(2) In reply to the latter, to state that a line of Mr. Hopkins' was made from the river mouth, where the land was

River.
Plate 5A. These are minutes written by 'A.G.M.' (i.e. McLean) and 'G.B.' (i.e. Barney, the Surveyor-General and Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands) on the back of the letter shown in plate 5. A reply embodying the substance of McLean's suggestions was prepared and despatched on the 14th of August. The text of this would be entered in the appropriate letter-book (i.e. 'Individuals'), and the number and date of despatch of this letter can be seen written obliquely across the minute - 57/606, 14 August.

57/8610. A letter received from the Secretary for Lands and Public Works, requesting that the local surveyor be instructed to report on the encroachments. N.B. That the registration number of this letter was recorded on the previous inward letter (see Plate 5A). The text of the letter sent to the Surveyor (number 57/954) was duly entered in the letter-book reserved for communications to surveyors.

Plate 6. 57/9199. This is the reply from the surveyor. N.B. (a) that Shone's letter has its own identification number, and that this would be entered in the register of letters received, in the column reserved for information on the source (see Plate 1, e.g. entry for 1726). (b) the notation of the numbers of the previous (57/8610) and the subsequent (57/11177) inward letters, (c) the transmission of the letter to McLean on the 9th, as instructed by the chief clerk,
PLATE 7
With reference to the letter from the Department of the 19th August last, respecting an alleged slip pass on the Berina Road, by Captain Hopkins.

I am directed to draw your attention thereto, and to request the favor of your early report as to the result.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

The Surveyor General

London, 12th March 1857
Plate 6. (d) the rather rare record of the subsequent movement of the letter as shown by the instruction to Mr. Adam (a draftsman),
(e) the initialled and dated authority for the file of papers to be put away.

Plate 7. 57/11,177. This is an example of the partly printed letter, introduced as a means of reducing clerical labour, and by this time extensively used in the public departments. It shows the usual features — the numbers of the previous and subsequent inward letters, the number and date of the letter sent to Shone, the summary of subject-matter as entered in the register, etc. In addition, however, the notation "end of Nov." draws attention to another practice, roughly equivalent to the modern method of 're-submitting' on a specified date those files or papers on which a decision or a reminder is required. It appears to have been a general practice during the last century, however, not to re-submit such papers on an individually specified date, but to keep them separate from other departmental correspondence, and to bring them to the attention of the chief clerk at the end of each month. There would be a special pigeon-hole or other place of storage for these 'end of month papers'. The present file, it follows, was not 'put away' after paper 57/11,177 was added to it, nor was it kept 'under reference', but instead would have been put with other 'end of the month' papers and re-submitted to the chief clerk on the 30th of November.
57/12,293. This is the final paper on the file, and rounds off the affair of the encroachment satisfactorily with the report by Shone that the necessary adjustments are being made. The Secretary for Lands and Public Works was informed of the outcome. When the file was put away, its position in the numerical sequence in the pigeon holes was determined by the registration number of the last inward letter attached (i.e. 57/12,293).

The files which were thus created were modest in their purpose and limited in their scope. Each consisted chiefly of letters received, with minutes written on the letters themselves, and each served unmistakably as a secondary form of arrangement for papers. Lacking either a permanent symbol of identification or a title, each file remained a mere agglomeration of individual papers, without any prospect of assuming an identity of its own. Each recorded only a proportion of whatever action might have been taken in conducting a piece of business and each, for its full interpretation, was dependent on other parts of the registry mechanism.

Given the conditions under which these methods had been developed and were being applied, there is much to be said in their favour. Wherever they were fully applied, they moulded records (and Archives) of the highest utility, and they did this largely because they reduced the arrangement and control of records to a well defined, comprehensive procedure. Only at one point - in the classification of in-letters
according to their subject-matter — were the discretion and judgement of the registry clerks put to the test. If this work were well done, then the conduct of business was facilitated; if not, then a list of in-letters in chronological order of receipt offered an independent means of tracing any of these records (and their related papers) should they be required.

We must remember, when approaching such a system as this, that it exemplifies registry work at its most elaborate and formal. As yet, the registry had not been called on to frame a compromise between the claims of traditional safeguards and the mounting pressure of departmental business. Consequently, established practices had not yet been called in question by 'new men' who were prepared to modify, adapt and dispense with routine as occasion demanded. It remained the care of every conscientious registry clerk to establish the identity of each paper, to ensure that the connection between all related papers was clearly indicated, and to be certain that, as each bundle of papers was finally put away, it contained every reference necessary for a complete reconstruction of action taken on any piece of business. "Old record officers," it was remarked in 1881, "would almost as soon expect to find that a letter had not been indexed as that a connection had not been recorded between it and previous or later correspondence, even although the papers should be apart; and it has always, so far as I am aware, been an understood thing that a record clerk requires but one number in a case to enable him to trace each and every other document in that case." 7

a conception which called for careful notation, thorough recording and the completion of every stage in a well-defined, comprehensive routine; improvisation was not encouraged.

There is good reason to believe that in its essentials, the system employed in the New South Wales Surveyor-General's Office represents the method of assembling and controlling departmental correspondence most commonly used until well into the present century. Direct examination shows that the Treasury, the Public Service Board and the Chief Secretary's Department of New South Wales all used a similar system, as did the Victorian Chief Secretary's Department. Moreover, the Minutes of Evidence compiled by the Boards, Committees and Commissions of Inquiry which investigated the working of various colonial departments suggest that other departments employed similar arrangements. Thus we have indications to this effect in the Colonial Architect's Department and the Public Works Department of New South Wales. More definite observations cover the New South Wales.

8. That is to say, the separate registration of papers received, the maintenance of a series of papers issued, the indexing of papers received chiefly by reference to their source and the creation of the simplest kind of file.


Central Police Office and the Departments of the Colonial Secretary and of Public Instruction in Queensland. A detailed account of registry practices of the conventional type is to be found in the Report issued by the Royal Commission into the Victorian Public Service.

In this case, the Commission made an unusually extensive examination of the Registry of Letters Division of the Crown Lands Department, and the system in operation there - a system which, according to one of the registry clerks, "has been in vogue in the public departments for some time past." Here, as in the New South Wales Surveyor-General's Office, all documents were registered; the register entry included a précis of the subject-matter of each item, details of its connection with other papers and a record of action taken on it; related papers were joined together in the form of files and put away under the registration number of the paper most recently attached; an index - both nominal and subject - to the correspondence was maintained. The most comprehensive piece of evidence, however, comes from Western Australia, where the pattern of record-keeping practices to be followed in public departments generally was set down in the printed


Regulations for the conduct of official business and correspondence

issued in Perth by the Colonial Secretary in 1884:

60. In the office of each department there shall be kept one
register, which shall be a register both of documents sent and
received, and which shall show all references and the ultimate
disposal of the correspondence in each case ... To all letters
and other documents entering and leaving the office numbers
shall be given, and written therein, corresponding with entries
in the register; the numbers shall be consecutive and in
annual series, beginning from the 1st of January, and, together
with the office numbers, the last two figures of the number of
the year shall be marked on all documents and minute papers,
thus 2546; the entries in the register shall show from whom
each document is received, or to whom sent, and its date and
subject, and shall give in a "disposal column" the purport
of the final minute or order concluding the correspondence ...

APPENDIX C. FORM OF DEPARTMENTAL REGISTER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>From Whom</th>
<th>To Whom</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Connected Papers</th>
<th>References to departments</th>
<th>How disposed of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

63. Each document received or sent must bear a number referring
to a separate entry in the departmental register. Documents
should not be registered more than once; but each fresh
occasion on which documents are received or despatched,
referred out or returned, should be noted (in the reference
column) under the original register entry bearing the
number of the minute paper enclosing the whole of the
documents forwarded.

64. All letters to the public, or communications between departments
... shall, before despatch, be entered into a letter book ...

66. An index book to the office register should be kept, and
should be posted to date, daily. Each registered document
should be entered in the index alphabetically, under the
name or departmental designation of the writer of the letter
or minute received, or of the person to whom the letter or
minute is sent. The register number of each document and
its subject are to be given in separate columns. Letter
copy should ... also be kept indexed to date, daily; the
person or department to or from whom the letter or minute is
addressed or received, its number, subject, and the page at
which it appears being shown. The index books above described being arranged under the names of the writers of documents received and the addressees of documents sent, will be in the form annexed. (Appendix D). A "Subject index" should also be kept in the form annexed. (Appendix E).

APPENDIX D FORM OF ALPHABETICAL NOMINAL INDEX TO (i) DEPARTMENTAL REGISTER AND (ii) DEPARTMENTAL LETTER BOOK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of writer or addressee</th>
<th>Whether sent or received</th>
<th>Register*</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* or Letter Book.

APPENDIX E FORM OF ALPHABETICAL SUBJECT INDEX TO (i) DEPARTMENTAL REGISTER AND (ii) DEPARTMENTAL LETTER BOOK.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Name of writer or addressee</th>
<th>Whether sent or received</th>
<th>Register*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Page No.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* or Letter Book.

During the second half of the century, many systems which shared this common tradition acquired idiosyncrasies of their own. Some of these appeared as a result of experience gained from the day to day
routine of the registry. In this category fall such practices as that of dividing the register into a number of volumes in order either to classify (by source) the latter received or to allow registers to be withdrawn from active use successively so that their latest entries might be posted in the index. Similarly, registries developed their own patterns for the arrangement of papers. Other innovations can be attributed to extra-departmental influences. Changes in the methods of minuting, the use of printed letters and cards, and the introduction of various mechanical devices might easily transpire from the visit of the numerous Boards, Committees and Commissions of Inquiry.

But it is significant that, in spite of the lapse of forty years, when the four new or 'non-transferred' departments of the Commonwealth (Attorney-General's, Treasury, Home Affairs, External Affairs) were established early in 1901, little in their registries would have been

15. This practice is illustrated by the registers of the New South Wales Public Service Board just before the end of the last century. It is also to be found in the registers of the Queensland Colonial Secretary's Department. Q. V. & P. Leg. Ass., 1889, Vol.I. Second Progress Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the general working of the civil service ... Minutes of evidence, p.170.

16. An example of this practice is to be found in the registry of the New South Wales Chief Secretary's Department at the end of the last century. See also Vic.P.P., 1873, Vol.II. Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the state of the Public Service and the working of the Civil Service Act. Minutes of evidence, p.151.

17. In one (the New South Wales Lands Department) for example, separate series of letters received and letters sent were retained until the end of the century. In another (the Victorian Chief Secretary's Department) the independently maintained series of letters sent was abandoned in the early 1860's, and copies of outward letters were attached to related inwards papers.
unfamiliar to a clerk from the old New South Wales Surveyor-General's Office.

Two of these early Commonwealth systems have come down to us intact. One - the first employed by the Department of External Affairs - was, so far as can be discovered, specially devised for the new department. The other - used by the Treasury for eighteen years - was based on the methods then in vogue in the Victorian Treasury. The essential characteristics of both are set out below:

Example II. Commonwealth Department of External Affairs.

Principal Elements of the System.

(i) Arrangement of papers: Related papers (both inwards and copies of outwards) were brought together to form files.

These were unjacketed and untitled.

(ii) Register/index: This volume is divided into two parts, a register and an index. In the register section, the particulars entered for each item extend across two pages divided into vertical columns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>From Whom</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Subject of Communication</th>
<th>Referred</th>
<th>Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To whom</td>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Previous</td>
<td>Subsequent</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first part of the volume is divided alphabetically. Entries were made by source and/or subject. Within each alphabetical...
division, entries were grouped in the following way: entries relating to individuals or to subjects on which little correspondence was anticipated were placed in a single alphabetical sub-division e.g. Oa-Op, Oq-Oz. More important subjects or subjects on which extensive correspondence was expected were grouped separately on subsequent pages under special sub-headings e.g. Old Age Pensions, Office Memos, Opium.

The Operation of the System.

On receipt, each inwards paper was allotted the number next available in the register and at the same time details of source, related papers etc. were entered in the adjoining columns. Next, the index entry was completed. Should any related papers have been received previously, these would be attached to the latest paper and the registration number of the previous paper last received would be entered in the 'Previous Papers' column.

The file of papers would then be circulated in the office, details of this career being entered in the 'Referred' columns. One copy of any replies sent in connection with the piece of business would be attached to the file of papers and another entered in a Letter-Book. Each copy carried the registration number of the inwards paper to which it related. The volume and page numbers of the Letter Book concerned were then entered in the 'Result of Application' column and the matter closed by a mark indicating that the file had been 'put away'. Should the transaction be revived, the existing file of papers would be attached to the newly received inwards paper and the registration number of the
latter entered in the 'Subsequent Papers' column alongside the number of the paper last received.

Example III. Commonwealth Treasury Department.

The details of this system are based on an examination of the records themselves and on a report on registry methods submitted to the Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner in January 1903.

Principal Elements of the System.

(i) Arrangement of papers: Related inwards papers were brought together to form files. These were unjacketed and untitled.

(ii) Registers: Papers received: This register was divided into a number of sections in order to classify papers by source. Within each section the pages were ruled in columns, reading from left to right:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registry No.</th>
<th>Attached Papers (No., Page, Book)</th>
<th>When received</th>
<th>Date of letter</th>
<th>No. of letter</th>
<th>From whom received</th>
<th>Referred (No. of minutes, To whom, When received)</th>
<th>Nature of Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Each volume contained a supplementary 'register of numbers', whose entries were arranged in two columns, devoted firstly to a

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list of consecutive numbers which supplied the means of identification for each registered paper, and secondly to the page number of the register on which details of the item might be found.

Papers issued: ("Letter Book Outwards") Again, this volume was divided into sections according to correspondent. Each page was ruled in columns, reading from left to right:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>To whom addressed.</th>
<th>Subject of Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Operation of the System:

Papers received. Each paper presented for registration was allotted the number next available in the consecutive list in the Register of Numbers. Then according to the source of the communication, selected details were entered in the appropriate section of the register proper. Finally the number of the register page on which these details could be found was entered alongside the registration number in the Register of Numbers.

Should any related registered papers exist, the registration number of the paper last or next received or both, were entered in the 'Attached Papers' column of the register. These entries indicated the registration number of the paper concerned, the page of the register on which it had been entered and the volume number of the register in which these details might be found.
The Operation of the System (cont.)

Papers issued: Papers signed for despatch were numbered before being press-copied. Particulars taken from the press-copy book were entered in the Letter Book Outwards. A précis of the letter was also endorsed on the related inwards paper.

Neither of these systems is in essence any different from those commonly in use during the previous century. One, it is true, dispensed with even the simplest form of index and as a substitute arranged the registration of letters received by reference to their source; in this characteristic, the system was unusual but not unique. The other was disposed to take indexing more seriously than had been the case thirty or forty years previously; but there is no difference in construction between the index as established by the registry clerks of External Affairs and the variety which flourished in colonial departments towards the end of the century. With a latitude common in the colonial period, one of these new Commonwealth registries attached copies of papers issued to the related inwards papers, while the other contented itself with writing a précis of the reply (or other action taken) on the inwards papers themselves. Both systems attended to the identity of individual papers, which, as a first step, were registered chronologically into a series of papers received or a series of papers issued. Both subsequently brought together related inwards papers and both maintained a separate series of outward papers bound in chronological order. In neither case did the files possess titles,
jackets or any means of identification beyond that provided for each of the inwards papers of which they were made up.

Almost a quarter of a century after the Commonwealth Treasury had outlined its registry methods to the Public Service Commissioner, an inspector of the Public Service Board began an examination of another, more recently established registry. The department in question - was not one of those created at Federation, but had come into being in 1917 chiefly for the purpose of absorbing many of the administrative responsibilities previously discharged by the Department of Home Affairs. With the functions had come many of the records, and with the records had been transferred a particular notion of record-keeping. In this way, Works and Railways became heir to practices which had been fashioned over a period of nearly twenty years. The system which the inspector discovered in 1924 had already begun to set aside some of the nineteenth century precepts and even to dispense with some of the apparatus. As of old, we find that control still extended to individual papers, but by default to only the more 'important' pieces, those which appeared to record a precedent or a turning-point in a particular piece of business. In pride of place stood a card index, an instrument which would have been quite unfamiliar to the old registry clerks of the New South Wales Lands Department; a card index which, moreover, not only recorded the number of each registered paper, but which also recorded most of the

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intimate details formerly to be found in the register. The latter, in fact, was by now curiously reduced in standing, supplying for each item a registration number, a reference to an index card and a record of movement. Outward letters were still controlled independently. "A separate copy of each outward letter, telegram or memorandum is taken by carbon process, " the inspector reported, " and filed in a General Book in date order, the folios being numbered consecutively." This General Book was indexed by a system of cards.

These arrangements the inspector considered to be unsatisfactory. The proposals which he put forward called for the abandonment of control over individual papers both inwards and outwards, and the substitution for this of control merely of files. He also desired the elimination of the separate series of outwards letters, together with the register and index by which it was controlled. If the inspector had had his choice, the existing system would have been replaced by one in which " ... Each file would have one number only which would under normal conditions remain unaltered until action on the file is complete. In exceptional cases where the action extends over two or more years the file would be re-registered under a new number each year, the necessary cross references being made on the relative record cards. ... " These would constitute a " numerical register containing the number and a brief description of the subject-matter of each file, with a space on the right hand side of the card or page for marking off the file, where such action is necessary," together with a subject index.
Such a system was certainly brief — it called for no more than one series of files, a simple form of index and a moderately elaborate register. But the proposed innovations were not acceptable. The defence of the existing system was undertaken by the Secretary of the department, W.D. Bingle, a man then sixty-three years of age, and who had been a public servant all his life, first with the Government of New South Wales and then, from 1901, with the Commonwealth. When he joined the New South Wales Lands Department, it had fallen to his lot to come frequently into contact with the early records of the department, and the administrative value of recording individual papers had impressed him greatly. Moreover (though he does not refer to this) his department had seen some rather unfortunate experiments in the "simplification" of the record system some five or six years before he joined it (see pp. 42-87 below), and he could hardly have remained ignorant of these events. On this present occasion he wrote to the Public Service Inspector: "The systems of recording papers which have come down to us are, I think, entitled to respect, and not to be lightly set aside. They represent the ripe experience of years of not one, but many British and Australian Departments, in which it must be assumed were able officers who knew their work, and were keen to effect improvements. ... Whilst I agree that the recording of papers relating to minor matters ... can be dispensed with, and will endeavour to meet the Board's wishes in this respect, I do not concur in more important cases with the proposal that files be given a number and inward and outward communications merely placed on the file without any record of their contents being taken. This, to my way of thinking, is not recording at all ..." Turning to the
question of outwards letters, the Secretary continued: "In this matter of recording outward correspondence, I am ... prepared to curtail the record as far as possible, but not altogether abolish it. It is considered essential that copies of certain outwards communications should be kept and recorded somewhere else than in files subject to loss or mutilation. ..."

In his rejoinder, the Public Service Inspector questioned the value of the elaborate system of registration adhered to by this particular department. He submitted that the real purpose of a record system is to enable files to be readily traced, and that the real text of a system is the facility with which this can be done. The efficiency of the system at present in use could not be questioned. The objections urged against it were those of being unnecessarily elaborate and expensive. Reasonable efficiency, it seemed to the inspector, was what was wanted, and this could be achieved by simpler and cheaper methods.

The deadlock was met by the expedient of appointing a departmental committee to inquire into and report on such economies of practice as seemed feasible. In a matter of weeks the committee submitted its report and the compromise which they suggested was agreed to by both parties. But the way in which the matter was resolved is not, at the moment, the point of interest. What does emerge from this episode with some force is that twenty-five years had been a sufficient length of time for the creation of a new climate of opinion concerning the character of registry operations. Here are ideas and practices
radically different from those entertained by the clerks who had constructed and operated the elaborate systems of the last century. Not only has equipment changed and the register been largely supplanted by the index, but there is talk from the one side of turning an expedient into a practice, of registering only selected documents, and from the other side of registering no documents at all. Implicit in the latter is the abandonment of the old, fundamental division of papers into series of letters received and letters sent. There is indeed a concrete suggestion that under no circumstances should the old outward series be tolerated. Here, too, is talk of "simpler methods" and (heresy indeed) of being content with "reasonable efficiency."

Such proposals are radical enough if examined in a nineteenth century context; not only are the props which seemed essential to a well constructed body of records all to be knocked away, but elaborate routine is no longer to be the comfort and security of registry clerks. This was a tremendous upset of traditional notions—too great for it to have been the result of a whim or some deep-seated eccentricity on the part of those concerned. For an explanation we must look, it seems, not at the Works and Railways Department in 1924, but to influences which had been shaping registry practices since the closing decades of the last century. The evidence of Boards, Committees and Commissions of Inquiry, the reports of Public Service Boards and their inspectors, and above all the character of the bodies of records themselves, suggest that in the registries of State and Commonwealth governments alike, two powerful forces of revolution and reform had been at work for very many years.
The first appears to be a growing impatience with the elaborate and cautious registration of individual papers, as practised by most nineteenth century registry clerks. The second, and in many ways complementary, development apparently took the form of a growing interest in the classification of papers by their subject-matter, an area of activity which came to offer not only a more subtle and comprehensive exposition of content, but also an economical solution to the problem of controlling a mounting tide of papers.

Twenty years before the end of the last century, a clerk in charge of a departmental registry had been exposed to temptation. His office - the Conditional Sales Branch of the New South Wales Department of Lands - had been in existence since 1872, but the effects of new land legislation brought down in 1875 marked a turning-point in the volume of correspondence which passed through the registry. Already disenchanted with the seemingly over-elaborate methods which he had inherited, William Blackman (the clerk in charge) was easily convinced that the routine which tradition prescribed placed too great a burden on the resources of his registry. Apparently without official approval or even connivance, the existing routine was, as Blackman put it, "abbreviated". Five years later, in 1881, the new methods were the subject of an official inquiry; and to the Report and the subsequent exchanges between the officers concerned we owe evidence of an early and striking challenge to the long accepted practices and aims of the registry. 20.

20. For the history of this episode see N.S.W. V. & P. Leg.Ass., 1883, Vol.II. Conditional Sales Branch of the Lands Office - Reports on, by Mr. Stephen Freeman.
In July 1881 Stephen Freeman, clerk in the Under-Secretary's 'division' of the Lands Department, began an official investigation into what was called "the management of the Conditional Sales Branch Records." His Report was completed and sent to the Under Secretary on 26 July 1881. It was a lengthy document, but a set of rules which he submitted for use in the Conditional Sales Branch provides a useful summary of the places at which he felt the existing practices were defective:

"1. Every paper when leaving the Record Branch should be noted in the register to the officer to whom it is sent.

2. Whenever there are two or more registered documents in any one case there should be a reference in the register showing the connection between such papers, even although they are not attached to each other.

3. All enclosures should be stamped and numbered with the registration No. of the covering paper.

4. All registered papers received in the Record Room prior to 3 p.m. on any day, and requiring to be transmitted to another Branch, should be noted on the same day, even although the noting clerk may have to remain after 4 o'clock for the purpose of doing the work.

5. All papers despatched to another Department after action is completed should be noted in ink.

6. All papers remaining in the Record Branch pending the receipt of reports from Commissioners, Inspectors, or other officers or Departments, should be noted "under reference" or "end of month," as the case may be, and not allowed to remain open or noted to some other Branch.

7. Every paper on which action is complete should be marked off in the register "put away," the date of putting by being given.

8. No papers should be put away or otherwise disposed of (excepting of course letters registered in the ordinary course and for the first time despatched from the Record Room) without direction, written in ink, bearing a date and the initials of the officer taking action in regard to same."
9. [Concerning rules of attendance at the office.]

10. The clerk in charge should occasionally inspect each officer's work, and should report to the Chief Commissioner any errors discovered, with the name of the clerk who is responsible. "21.

The Report was sent to Hoskins, the Secretary for Lands, who agreed with many of the criticisms and remedies put forward by Freeman. He insisted that (1) the system of receipts for papers withdrawn from the registry should begin at once, (2) that notations on papers should be written in ink, and should include the initials of the clerk who made them, as well as the date, and (3) that all papers must be transmitted via the registry.

From Hoskins, the Report went to the head of the Conditional Sales Branch. With some misgivings, the Chief Commissioner accepted the direction that receipts should be issued for documents withdrawn from the registry; he then referred the rest of Freeman's proposals to Blackman, the clerk in charge of the registry. From this quarter came a spirited and interesting response, expressed in a Minute of 26 July.

Freeman, in Blackman's eyes, was one of "the old record clerks," brought up to believe "in the comforts, conveniences, and irresponsibilities of routine;" and accustomed to record rooms which were "as private as a monastery," far removed from the press and bustle of daily life in the department. The sole ambition of such clerks,

Blackman maintained, was to ensure that their "completed work" was as close to perfect as possible. As each paper or file of papers was put away, it must carry initialled or signed authorisations for every action taken; enclosures must be clearly and securely connected with their covering papers; every register and index entry must have been completed. In other words, every stage of the traditionally elaborate and well-defined routine must have been completed in order to ensure that should the papers ever be taken up again, there would be a clear and comprehensive account of all that had been done in connection with a particular case.

"Now let us suppose," Blackman continued, "that an Inspector was sent to examine the fossil papers of the old Survey Department whose rule for determining when a Record Branch was efficient was that laid down by Mr. Freeman," a check examination of completed work. "Well, he would find the old records in the highest state of completion, nothing forgotten. The old record clerks were exhaustively precise. They never made mistakes. "Record Branch highly efficient." We look further than the record clerks, and find the Survey Department in a state of collapse, and all business at a standstill. Of what benefit was the extravagant caution and multiplied safeguards that signally failed to attain the end for which alone they were worth using?"

"Suppose," conjectured Blackman, "that for any public purpose, such as the need of retrenchment, the Minister had to say to the Chief

22. Ibid., p.12.
Commissioner, "You have twenty clerks at Records, I can only give you fifteen," what would be the duty of the Record staff? "... Mr. F. will have the completed work or nothing. The fifteen clerks must do the work of twenty." 23. Clearly, fifteen could not follow the same routine as twenty, and accomplish the same volume of records work as before. Was the work to stop, then? This Blackman denied. Instead, he suggested that the fifteen should "simplify and abbreviate the routine until it came within the compass of their strength," 24. as, in fact, had been done in the Conditional Sales Branch registry. This, to Freeman, would naturally be a strange world: "beaten tracks and finger-posts were summarily set aside," and the clerks were "thrown upon their own intelligence and trained like a black-tracker to see connection and clues in the conduct of their work." 25.

Blackman admitted that an inspection of the records which had been accumulated under such conditions would reveal "papers disconnected; cases not indicating their whereabouts to a "novice" at a glance; papers "put away" and at "end of month" without formal authority, pencil memoranda, nothing written in full, nothing written at all that could be left out; but what was the result? Business overtaken, arrears nil, work done within the week, frequently within the day." 26.

23. Ibid., p.9.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
Whatever may have been the rights and wrongs of this particular controversy have no bearing on our present purpose. For this, the significance of the episode is to be found in the fact that it is an excellent illustration (in fact, one of the best documented examples that we have from the last century) of a problem which sooner or later confronted countless registries in other departments throughout all Australian colonies. In essence, the problem is simple; how to adjust registry practices so as to preserve an adequate form of control over a constantly increasing volume of papers. Here a solution was sought by encouraging informality in registry procedures. The practice may or may not have adversely affected the quality of the business being conducted from the records by the department; familiarity and memory can do much to offset the shortcomings of an ailing registry system. But what is indisputable is that the quality of the records being laid up for the future — "papers disconnected," "nothing written at all that could be left out" — had changed for the worse.

In other quarters, so far as one can judge, adherence to accepted practices weakened more gradually. But there can be no doubt that by the end of the last century, before the attractions of modern business systems were canvassed in public departments and before the assiduous attention of the new Public Service Boards and Commissioners combined to complete the demolition of the old registry edifice, some of the foundations had already been stealthily removed.

Nowhere is this development more apparent than in the processes
connected with the registration of documents. Nineteenth century custom, it will be recalled, prescribed the control of papers individually; the well-being of each letter received or sent was a matter of concern (theoretically at least) to every registry clerk. In the present century, this careful attention formerly extended to all has become a privilege accorded to a steadily decreasing proportion of departmental papers. It would be difficult, probably impossible, to determine when this decline began or the reason which prompted it; the most that can be attempted is to suggest that it appeared in any registry as soon as a hard-pressed clerk found himself obliged to 'abbreviate' one or more stages of the elaborate routine and trust to memory to supply the want. An excellent example of such an expedient is to be found in the records already described in Example II, and concerns register entry no. 1/48. This, careless even at the outset, merely records the receipt of "Papers relating to the New Hebrides," where thirty or forty years previously the identity of each would have been recorded.

### Register entry:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>From Whom</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Subject of communication</th>
<th>Referred To whom</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>Previous</th>
<th>Subsequent</th>
<th>Result of application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/48</td>
<td>17 Feb.</td>
<td>Office Memo</td>
<td></td>
<td>Papers relating to New Hebrides</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the index, nine papers are listed under that number. (Certain abbreviations in the original have been extended.)

Letter from Jas. Lyall.

Rev. J. Cosh.

New Hebrides. Premier South Australia forwarding papers re.
A search through files on related subjects has produced another three. The questions then arise - what were the papers received on the 17th of February, are the nine listed in the index the same or, like those now on the file, are they an addition to those referred to in the register? In short, how many papers once carried the number 1901/148, what were they, and where are they now? Such a practice, repeated frequently, must have an important effect on the character of the body of records which is being accumulated. It means that many files were being built up on the pattern:

\[\text{REGISTERED PAPERS} \quad \text{UNREGISTERED PAPERS}\]

and that only periodically was the character of the file subjected to examination. Consequently (and this is an important consideration) the volume and disposition of an increasing proportion of the correspondence created by a department were becoming matters for conjecture. Nevertheless, it seems that this was a risk which many departments were willing (or perhaps obliged) to accept; for the restriction of registration to papers which either were considered 'important' or which marked a new stage in a particular piece of business can be seen as widely accepted official practice before the end of the First World War.
An early example of this is recorded in a survey of departmental record systems compiled by the New South Wales Public Service Board in 1905; alongside the entry for the Chief Secretary's Department appears the note "In the Ministerial Office and some of the sub-departments supplementary papers bear the same number as the original paper." Both the Commonwealth Treasury and the early Department of External Affairs, already referred to in Examples III and II, regularly indulged in this practice. But the most striking evidence of changes in the standards and practices of departmental registries during the earlier part of the present century is supplied by the Final Report of the Royal Commissioners appointed in 1916 to inquire into the Victorian Public Service, together with Appendix A to the same Report. In the text of their Final Report the Commissioners remark on the varying character of the record systems to be found in the several departments, sub-departments and branches. "In some Departments, "they continue," the registration of documents is restricted to those of an important character. In others registration is regarded as a sort of fetish, and every document is registered. We consider that a responsible officer in every Department should glance through the correspondence every day, and select the matters that are of sufficient importance to be registered, and those that should merely be attached to previous correspondence. A great deal of useless

27. Vide an unregistered paper entitled 'Record Systems', found in company with papers relating to the operations of the Records Committee, in New South Wales Public Service Board file 06/4839. The latter is now in the custody of the Mitchell Library.

clerical labour would thus be obviated."

These observations were based on the results of a survey of the systems followed in sixty-four departments, sub-departments and branches, carried out by an officer of the Victorian Lands Department and submitted as Appendix A to the Final Report. Practices varied greatly. One office - the Penal and Reform Branch of the Chief Secretary's Department - comes very close to the simplest form of system, with a register for letters received and one for letters sent, and no form of index. Another - the Department of Agriculture - was well ahead of its time and registered nothing, the files being kept in drawers and arranged according to subject in precisely the same order as the lexicographical card system which was in use. Instead of registration, an officer, on receipt of a letter, classified it by subject and indicated the classification in red ink. But between these extremes lay a group of registries in which it was the practice to register only selected papers. In the Chief Secretary's Department, for example, only important papers were registered, other matters being attached immediately to files; in the Department of Labour, registration was again restricted to important matters; similarly, the Department of Public Health refrained from numbering subsequent correspondence where a "recognised file" existed.

But by the time at which this Report was published, some public departments had already taken a further step away from the conventions

29. Ibid., p.106.
of the last century, and in so doing, established a line of development which became widely followed in the years immediately after the First World War. From a decision to register, individually, only selected 'important' papers and thus in all likelihood to register only a proportion of the papers which made up any file, it is a small step to decide to register only one paper on each file. Describing the record-keeping system which had been employed in his registry for some time, the officer in charge of the Works Branch in Canberra wrote in 1918:

"Each letter inwards is given a number, if the subject-matter is new, forming the basis of a file, and all subsequent correspondence (inwards and outwards) is placed on the file without any further registration. If there is already a file concerning the subject-matter of the letter, the letter is placed on the file without further registration." 30.

The step was indeed a small one, but it had considerable implications. It marked the final abandonment of the inwards and outwards series as a basis for the control of departmental correspondence. With it, the removal of the scaffolding on which nineteenth century systems had been constructed, was complete. Where the new methods were followed, papers (not even a proportion of them) were no longer first identified as part of a series of papers received or sent and then brought together into files; instead papers were placed directly on to whichever file their subject-matter indicated to be appropriate. Now the volume and disposition of an even higher proportion of departmental correspondence went unrecorded. The register itself recorded

30. C.A.O. C.P. 698, Series 12. Unregistered paper entitled "Correspondence, Plans Record and Leave Register."
nothing more than the order of the creation of files, and as often as not the related index became as a result a key to files, not to the papers which composed them. Classification became the major art of the registry, and a paper inappropriately concealed under a badly constructed file-title was to all intents a paper lost, since there was no independent record of its identity (such as the register) which could be searched as a last resort. The well-being of individual papers was no longer an economical consideration.

If the step marked the disappearance of what had been perhaps the most characteristic aspect of nineteenth century record-keeping methods, it also marked a new stage in the development of the file. Now the latter was more independent than its nineteenth century counterparts had ever been. These had always taken their identification and their position in the physical arrangement of records from the registration symbol of the papers which were added successively; such files were no more than the parts which made them up. Now, however, the file took on a character of its own; papers were identified in terms of the file to which they belonged, not the other way round. Some systems insisted that the papers added should receive some form of identification. Thus, for example, we can trace instances of papers receiving what are called folio numbers,

31. Occasionally, the registration number of the first paper was used, regardless of however many registered papers were added subsequently. But usually the registration number employed was that of the paper most recently added.
with each paper of file 27/4672 receiving a separate number -
27/4672/1, 27/4672/2 etc.; in some cases these items are registered,
in others they are bestowed informally. Other systems, like the
one from the Works Branch referred to above, arrived at nothing more
than the identification of the file. But at either extreme, there
was now no particular necessity for a simple, numerical arrangement
of files. Many departments, it is true, continued to use such a
scheme, and relied on such independent instruments as indexes to
provide a key to the series of files. But others determined to
group their files in some apparently more useful order, and to
identify each file as part of a pre-determined scheme of classification.
This method, which presumably owes something to the decimal systems of
classification, quickly appears in the Commonwealth period. Perhaps
the earliest example is provided by the Commonwealth Department of
External Affairs which, in the middle of 1901, converted traditional
nineteenth century methods into a scheme which contains the elements
of what were later known as 'classified' systems:

Example IV. Correspondence Records of the Commonwealth Department of
External Affairs, July 1901 - December 1901.

Principal Elements of the System.

(i) Arrangement of papers: In the form of files, with (usually)
file jackets and titles.
Example IV (cont.)

(ii) Register: Each page was numbered and divided in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progressive Number</th>
<th>Date of Letter Receipt</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Operation of the System:

Each page of the register was intended to record the receipt (and in some cases the despatch) of papers relating to a particular subject. Here was the primary classification. The first paper dealing with one aspect of the subject represented by the register page received the number 1, and was entered as such on the register page. This provided the secondary class. Subsequent papers which were related to item number 1 were entered under that number on the register page and were placed in the same file of papers. Should a paper be received which opened up a new aspect, it was designated as number 2, and related papers were grouped round it both physically and in the register. Page 82 might be taken as presenting a typical appearance:
### Example IV (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progressive Number</th>
<th>Date of Letter</th>
<th>Date of Receipt</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22.7.01</td>
<td>24.7.01</td>
<td>Min.H.A</td>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Requesting wire to Pr. W.A. that C'wealth Govt. are placing sum on estimates for maintenance of Public Buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.7.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sec.H.A.</td>
<td>Sec.H.A.</td>
<td>Advising wire has been sent in the form requested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23.7.01</td>
<td>26.7.01</td>
<td>Pr.H.S.W.</td>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Fed particulars of gentlemen appd by N.S.W. Govt. to report on cost and present value of lands, buildings, guns, material etc., transferred to C'wealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>29.7.01</td>
<td>2.8.01</td>
<td>Grant &amp; Cooks</td>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Suggesting construction of replica of Swearing In Pavilion in Centennial Park of similar material to that originally used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.8.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Pr.H.S.W.</td>
<td>Pdng copy of Grant &amp; Cooks' letter for opinion of Govt. Architect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.8.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pr.H.S.W.</td>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Ackng letter 19.8.01 &amp; stating that Mr. Vernon has been invited to furnish an opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.9.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>P.M.</td>
<td>Pr.H.S.W.</td>
<td>Requesting to be supplied with Mr. Vernon's Report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>19.8.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sec.H.A.</td>
<td>Sec.H.A.</td>
<td>Requesting that Pr. Vic. be asked to allow Public Works Dept. of Vic. to supervise repairs to Post Offices and other Federal buildings until arrangements for Fed. W. Dept. are perfected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, subject no. 82 might be taken as "Property Transferred to Commonwealth", with file no. 1 dealing with "Provision of funds by Commonwealth", file no. 2 with "Provision of maintenance services by State officers on behalf of the Commonwealth", and so on. The files would be identified as: 01/82/1 2 3 (i.e. year/file no./page no./file no.)

This method can more properly be regarded as an experiment than anything else. Within eighteen months of its inception, the
department had reverted to a 'pure' nineteenth century system, with papers identified first as part of an inwards and outwards series, and then brought into files; these were arranged in simple numerical sequence. But for eighteen months, the Commonwealth had had its first collection of independent files and had made its first attempt to class them by subject-matter. In four years' time the method was to return to Commonwealth practice and to begin a continuous history of development.

These changes in the process of registration, and the changes in what might be called the physical arrangement of papers which they promoted, were accompanied by an increasing interest in the index to correspondence.

Indexing, when it aimed at nothing more than recording the source of papers received or the name of addressees to whom papers had been sent, was a process almost as mechanical as that of recording the receipt and despatch of letters in registers or letter-books. Only when it moved from this plane to one of classifying the subject-matter of papers in a less concrete way, only when it became concerned with such general matters as Finance or External Relations, and the multiplicity of relationships that can be found in the subject-matter of any diverse body of correspondence - only then did indexing become a difficult art. It was not until towards the end of the nineteenth century that embellishments of this sort began to claim equality with the more pedestrian nominal index. There were, of course, a number of handicaps to be overcome. Not least was the inexpertness of the
registry clerks themselves. Men who were disposed to regard the mechanical processes of registration and the indexing of names as a severe intellectual exercise were naturally reluctant to embark on something which required not only initiative but also intelligence. Again, the equipment at their disposal left much to be desired; it was not impossible to operate, but it was unaccommodating enough to ensure that such a subject-indexing as was undertaken presented an untidy, almost disorderly appearance. The most customary arrangement was for each volume of the register to be equipped with an index either at the front or back. This immediately presents one unfortunate circumstance. When beginning a new volume, existing headings could be marshalled alphabetically; but with this arrangement committed to the bound pages of a book, it was difficult to make allowances for new and unknown headings which might occur while the register volume was still in current use. The usual remedy was simply to add new headings to the existing list. Since alphabetically arranged lists were likely to be of only temporary accuracy, it seems that most clerks were discouraged from attempting even initially to regularise the subject-headings. Moreover, for obvious reasons, the entries made in succession under the subject-headings could rarely follow an alphabetical order. The following is an example of the disorderly appearance presented by most indexes of the nineteenth century type:
Subject-Headings 'M'

Marshall Islands,
Mining,
Melbourne Collector of Customs,
Medical,
Mail Services,
"Merrie England" SS
Meat,
Maize,
Malaria,
Maps,
Memorials,
Migration,
Mauritius,
Medals,
Money Orders,
Murders,
Missing Persons,
Machinery,
Meteorology,
Mottoes,
Mexico,
Marriages,
Malta.

Individual Entries, OL-OZ.

Olive Malouf
Otomoatu Yoshida
Olequa
Orient S.N. Co.
Orme, Geraldine
"Omrah" - immigrants per
"Orotowa" - books from London per
"Ophir" - arrival of
Osborne, J.W.
Onus, J.
Oriental Pearling Co.
Outtrim, P.O.

Where the register was divided annually into a number of volumes, obstacles to ready consultation increased proportionately. Not only does each index reflect inherent technical imperfections, but the pursuit of papers connected with business extending over many months involves the use of two or more indexes. The problem reached its greatest heights in the case of one Commonwealth department whose registers (and indexes) multiplied and sub-divided in a quite intricate pattern between 1901 and 1917. The registry began with one annual volume, and ended, in 1917, with:
It is true that because the register was divided by subject and not chronologically, a number of index entries are to be found in only one of the volumes. But it is also the case that a number of headings - e.g. Papua, Printing, Railways - are common to a number of volumes. In these instances, the discovery of related papers could be a lengthy and troublesome proceeding.

Quite clearly what was wanted was an index which could remain current for a lengthy period and which not only allowed existing headings, sub-headings, and the individual entries to be made alphabetically, but which could similarly accommodate the new headings and entries required as departmental business developed. Card indexes, it seemed, could supply that need.

Card indexes were in vogue, at least in the public departments of Victoria, the Commonwealth and New South Wales well before the beginning of the First World War. The final Report of the Royal Commission on the Victorian State Public Service issued in 1917, contains a valuable appendix on departmental record systems. 32. Here,

out of forty-three departments, sub-departments and branches examined, at least twelve had adopted one variety or another of card systems for their correspondence by 1917. In the Commonwealth, card systems were introduced in two distinct stages. The first took place in 1906, when the Office of the Public Service Commissioner broke with tradition and converted its index to cards. Five years later, half the existing departments also introduced one of two varieties of card register/index. Tradition has it that this minor revolution was brought about by the efforts of a particularly able representative of a firm which specialised in office 'systems'. On the other hand, the change in New South Wales came, rather surprisingly, as a result of a report on the Civil Service of Natal. The Annual Report of the Public Service Board of New South Wales, issued in 1906, summarised the course of events.

"The desirability of improvement in the record systems which are in vogue in the various Departments of State has frequently been brought under the notice of the Board, who have long been under the impression that a considerable simplification of this work might be undertaken with a view to the facilitation of work, and the consequent lessening of expenditure ..."

"The necessity for some steps being taken to this end was specially emphasised on the Board reading a report on the Natal Civil Service of Mr. Henry Higgs, Civil Service Commissioner of Natal." In due course the Board appointed a Committee to report on the extent to which the various record branches of departments might be amalgamated and the ways in which record systems might be simplified or otherwise improved.

"These gentlemen ... reported on the 11th May, 1906, that an examination of the system in actual operation confirmed the opinion that it was needlessly elaborate and costly, and they recommended the amalgamation of the separate Record branches
"which are now under the same roof, and the adoption of what is known as the 'card system', in lieu of book registration."  

A file, now in the custody of the Archives Department of the Mitchell Library, provides the text of the Report.

"After much deliberation we have come to the conclusion that the Card System of indexing is superior for record purposes to the system of book registration, being more convenient and less costly, both as regards material and the staff required to work it.

This system, it should be remembered, is no longer in the experimental state; in England and America it has been in general use for years, and is now rapidly replacing ledgers, stock books, registers of correspondence, etc., in the largest business houses in Sydney ...

The stock objection made by persons unfamiliar with the system, that the mobility of the cards renders them liable to displacement and loss, is not we think worthy of serious consideration. It assumes a careless and incompetent staff, such a staff will throw any system into confusion; and it ignores the experience of business people who find that with competent clerks, the mobility of the cards is a great advantage. It makes possible the removal of dead matter from the working cabinets; and in case of a sudden rush of business, enables the Manager or officer in charge to utilise as many clerks as he pleases in making entries, whereas only one clerk at a time can work on a book register.

For these and other reasons too obvious to need discussion, we recommend the adoption and gradual instalment in all Record offices \( \text{i.e. Registries} \) of cards in place of registers and indexes."

A Conference of Permanent Heads to whom the Report was submitted on 12 June endorsed the findings of the Committee: "That it is desirable that the Heads of Departments be requested to introduce the Card System for their record work as far as practicable after making due inquiry.


34. M.L. New South Wales Public Service Board file, 06/4839.
as to the cost of its installation as set against the saving in labour." The Premier subsequently indicated his approval and the Board prepared a circular, dated 27 July 1906, asking the heads of departments to take steps to give effect to the recommendation of the Conference of Permanent Heads.

Sentiments similar to those set out by the Conference of Permanent Heads were expressed some ten years later by the Royal Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Victorian Public Service. "We do not think," they observed, "that a universal system for all Departments can be devised, but we recommend that the card system should be introduced in all Departments where such a system is suitable, and that two officers from Departments where the card system is in operation should be selected to advise and assist in the introduction of it to other Departments in which it can be successfully applied." 35.

The 'card systems' which were introduced into the public departments of Australia were not, as a rule, mere substitutes for the existing volumes. It is true that so far as the organisation of the index was concerned, the subject-headings and individual entries provided in the volumes were often transferred directly on to cards. Moreover the practice of distinguishing between matters on which there was likely to be little correspondence and those which represented a substantial part of departmental business was also taken over from the volumes to the card indexes. Thus the 'A' section of a card index,

for example, would fall into two parts: the first, running from Aa - Az, in which cards were filed in alphabetical order, and the second, in which cards were grouped under such headings as Administrative Arrangements, Antiques, Aviation. But, unlike the practice observed in the index volumes, the entries on the cards offered far more information than the registration number of the items concerned; details about each item which had formerly been recorded in the register were now entered on the index cards. By these arrangements, the register and the index were brought into a closer association than had been the case previously:

Example V: Operation of register and card-index.

**Register**: Each page of the register was divided in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Card</th>
<th>Referred</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>To Whom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>When</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Index**: One section for each letter of the alphabet; each section subdivided into (i) an alphabetical run and (ii) a series of subject-headings. The cards carried the following information:

36. The information given varies from one system to another. Sometimes, for example, the numbers of the 'subsequent papers' are given alongside each item; sometimes the 'referred' details are provided on the index card, not in the register.
Example Y (cont.)

Index:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The System in Operation.

A paper dealing with a new subject, was, on receipt, allotted the next available number in the 'number' column of the register. The subject-matter of the letter was then cast in a form suitable for an index entry, and this version was entered (a) in the 'card' column of the register and (b) at the head of a blank index card. Finally, the various columns on the card were filled in and the card filed away in the index. Further papers on the same piece of business received a new registration number, but were entered, in succession, on the existing index card and the title of this card was recorded alongside their numbers in the register.

In such an arrangement as this it is clear that the index has usurped much of the importance formerly enjoyed by the register. The latter now has no greater function than to provide consecutively a series of numbers which can be applied to papers as they leave and
return to the office. For the rest, the searcher is referred to an
index card. Bearing in mind the nature of the information supplied
by these cards, it was inevitable that the index should become the
centre of interest. A development of this sort had already begun
before the introduction of card indexes. One of the returns asked
for by the New South Wales Public Service Board in connection with its
inquiry into departmental record systems refers, on numerous occasions,
to what was called the Alphabetical System, or the Register-Index
System. 37. This system closely resembled the later systems of
register and card index. Incoming papers were allotted a number
from a 'skeleton' register; alongside this number was marked the
folio of a second register in which, according to its subject-matter,
full particulars of the paper were entered in an appropriate alphabetical
section. 38. The incomplete records of the Lands and Survey Branch
of the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs suggest that until 1911,
something similar may have been employed there. Registers before
1911 refer not to the title of a card, but to a Folio; this may well
have been a reference to a page in a register-cum-index where full
details of papers were recorded under alphabetical headings. 39. But

37. An unregistered paper entitled 'Record Systems', found in company
with papers relating to the operations of the Records Committee.
See New South Wales Public Service Board, file 06/4839. The latter
is now in the custody of the Mitchell Library.

38. A similar procedure was followed in the registry of the Commonwealth
Treasury. See Example III above.

39. Since this was written, just such a Register/Index came to light
in February 1961 in the Leasing Branch of the Department of the
Interior.
it is easy to see why card indexes later replaced this second register. Not only would the alphabetical order of the entries follow the usual eccentric course, but it would only be by accident that related entries on a particular page would fall consecutively. Thus, for example, the record of the first paper concerned with a particular transaction might be separated from that of the second by any number of entries, all of which were correctly placed under the same general index heading, but all of which refer to quite different pieces of business going forward in that connection.

Solutions to these problems, together with what was called their 'mobility', were the great advantages offered by cards. Here was provided (in the 'number' column) a list of all the (registered) 'previous' and 'subsequent' papers associated with a particular subject; here was recorded the registration number which had to be quoted in reply; here was the name of the correspondent concerned; here were the précis of subject-matter, much referred to it seems when papers were missing for one reason or another; here (often duplicating the entry made in the register) was a record of the movement of each item. Moreover, the card not only presented the same information as was formerly supplied by the register, but now it was possible to gather together those related entries which from the nature of the case had previously been scattered through any number of pages. Here was a convenient summary of action taken which had been denied to the nineteenth century clerk, and here was a medium which allowed several registry clerks to work on the same set of records simultaneously. Well might the departments have been impressed favourably by such a prospect.
Developments such as these in the processes of registration and indexing marked the end of the nineteenth century tradition. In its place came not a well-defined, widely employed set of methods, but a great variety of systems, differing one from the other in the extent to which they retained or dispensed with older practices. In the present century, it soon becomes impossible to speak of a 'common tradition' or to regard one system as being in any way more 'typical' than another. The ways in which innovations may be combined are virtually endless. Usually, the three elements—registration, indexing and what might be called the physical classification of papers into files—remain. But now the registration may be of a greater or less proportion of papers (but never of them all), or it may extend no further than to each file; now the process may extend to the recording of intimate details of each paper or file, or it may involve no more than the allocation of a number, with details of the paper or file entered elsewhere; now the entries may be made in a register and an index together, or only in a specially reserved section of an index. The index, as a form of control, may continue to be simply an auxiliary of the register, or it may come to be a senior partner with the register, or it may entirely replace the register as the means of control. The files of papers may consist (wholly or partially) of items which are identified primarily as components of a different, independent, scheme of arrangement, or of items identified solely in terms of the file to which they belong; files may be arranged in an order imposed by their independently controlled contents, or simply in order of their creation, or in a pre-determined pattern of subject-classification.
For archivist and historian, these developments present old problems in new forms. The ways in which documents are compiled has long been a field of inquiry for the archivist and the knowledge thus acquired an important item in the equipment of the historian. Methods of authentication, seals, insignia and means of identification, diplomatic, palaeography and even office routine - all these are fields in which archivist and historian have found common interest. The interest remains, but now attention must be directed at matters which are at once more familiar and more remote, issues which have escaped recognition because few suspect any complexities in the use of five or six pages of typescript enclosed between a cardboard cover. Yet if we examine this instrument more closely, if we ask why these five or six pieces of paper are presented in this fashion, were they always like this, are there any related papers differently disposed here or in another body of records, on which set of evidence did the department take action? - if we put these questions and expect answers to them, archivist and historian together must move into the sphere of the registry and its systems. Here is an extension to an old line of inquiry, one which requires its own investigations, possesses its own chronology, poses its own problems of language and requires its own vehicles of description. Here, in short, is the basis of the archivist's craft as applied to modern departmental records, and here are the sources from which the enlightenment of the historian must proceed.
2. THE OPERATION OF THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT.

Professor Galbraith once wrote, "The State, after all, is an artificial contrivance and the "growth" of its records really proceeds by a series of deliberate innovations, rather than a continuous natural expansion. I would rather, using a more humdrum comparison, liken them to an old house which has been continually enlarged and altered through the centuries, but which is still lived in."¹ This is an illuminating metaphor; but few governmental residences have been noted for their symmetry. Moreover, some of the recent extensions have lacked the solidity of the structure to which they have been added. New rooms, perhaps whole wings, are thrown out in a trice and as speedily abandoned; sometimes the empty places remain, museum-like, for our inspection; sometimes they have been allowed to collapse and their foundations to disappear from view. Too often the visible ground plan is misleading and deep excavation required to determine the structure which once rose on the site.

In Australia, such excavation has barely begun. Machinery of government has only recently become a field for study. A little has been written on the existing machinery, much less has been said of its historical development, and there is as yet no local handbook comparable with, for example, The Organization of British Central Government, 1914-1956. The archivist, of course, is interested only in certain

historical aspects of public administration. Recruiting of staff, the conditions of their employment and the like are not, in the normal course of events, relevant to the arrangement and description of records; his horizon is limited to the organisation of departments and the distribution of administrative responsibilities.

There are, in Australia, a number of official sources from which such information can be supplied. The sets of Administrative Arrangements supply the principal functions and legislation administered by the various departments and other agencies. Estimates, particularly in the sections devoted to miscellaneous expenditure, often have much to say of the minor administrative activities and interests of the department or office; here provision is made for the administration of a fund, for the support of an institute or for the expenses of a commission of inquiry. Lists of Permanent Officers are useful in that they indicate the principal sub-divisions - branches, sections - of each agency. As far as the internal organisation of agencies is concerned, the Estimates are useful to a point, since the major branches of a department are often made the subject of individual financial arrangements, but the various Lists of Permanent Officers are more sensitive to the minutiae of office organisation. Information of this sort may, in a few instances, be augmented by the minutes of evidence compiled in the course of inquiries into the working of a

3. These are official notices which set out in tabular form the distribution of administrative responsibilities between the agencies of government. The tables and amendments are published in government Gazettes from time to time.
particular department. None of these sources is entirely satisfactory, of course, since none have been compiled with the purpose in mind for which the archivist now consults them. The Lists of Permanent Officers, for example, are usually limited to officers on the civil establishment, with the result that the organisation of departments connected in any way with matters of defence is barely represented. Again, all these sources suffer from the fact that, not being intended as a continuous record of changes, they illuminate the administrative scene only at intervals; events in the intervening periods may or may not be reflected.

Unofficial sources rarely supply any of these deficiencies. Compiled as a rule from the replies to circulars and questionnaires sent to the departments of the day, the Almanacs and Directories appear to have regarded any information as better than none. Should a department or office fail to supply the details of organisation and staff as requested, the information last obtained was simply reprinted without any explanation or word of warning. The only virtue of these sources is that they may give the address of the department or agency, and this can sometimes be useful. The complement to the printed official sources is to be found in the archives themselves. Here, the files of correspondence, the memoranda and the minutes which were themselves the instruments of change record, day by day and month by month, the details of current administrative organisation with an intimacy which no other source can match. Here, a single notation or even an initial may solve a problem which if it were left to the administrative arrangements or the Staff Lists, would remain unsolved.
That there have been changes in the organisation of government is all too obvious. Departments have come and gone, their names reflecting a mixture of past administrative expedients and the pursuit of political programmes. At a lower level of administrative organisation, offices, branches and sections have been created, abandoned or amalgamated even more frequently, and responsibility for the administration of functions has varied accordingly. We may safely presume, as well, that the past century has seen many changes in the sphere of office organisation and routine; there is a world of difference between the informal organisation which characterised many of the earlier colonial departments and the complicated structure of present-day departments. But the scale and nature of these events remain uncertain. At the moment, there is no prospect of considering such matters in general terms for the whole of the colonial and Commonwealth periods; in too many cases the raw materials for such an inquiry still wait to be assembled. The most that can be done at present is to select certain aspects which seem to call for some investigation, and to apply to each as many of the resources for inquiry as are accessible.

Many colonial departments were the subject of official inquiry during the second half of the last century, but the workings of few were scrutinised as frequently as those of the various departments or branches which administered the survey, sale and management of crown lands in New South Wales. In the course of twenty-three years a Commission of Inquiry (1855), a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly (1858), and a Commission (1878) submitted their reports
on the various aspects of departmental economy which had been set down for investigation. None of the three examinations was intended to survey every aspect of the current arrangements relating to the administration of crown lands. But if defective in this respect, they excel in another. The opportunity offered of successive glimpses into the economy of several public offices which possessed the same administrative traditions and which, to a very great extent, belonged to the same administrative entity, is without parallel in the history of the Australian colonies before 1900. Rich in detail, the evidence brought together by these inquiries illuminates almost every aspect of the conditions which existed in a government department of the day. The nucleus of long-serving officers, each increasingly sensible of his position in the hierarchy; the opportunities for ambitious and acquisitive clerks, together with a barely concealed hostility between faction and faction; the vexed question of responsibilities and the rudimentary forms of discipline; the numerous 'rooms' each with its complement of clerks and each under the supervision of the head of the branch; above all, the notion of gentility and sense of 'profession' with which so many of the clerks dignified their situation—all those characteristics are clearly delineated. Most important of all for our present purpose, however, is the interest which the investigators displayed in matters of office organisation and, in particular, in the administration of departmental correspondence. As a result of this, it is possible to reconstruct the daily routine under which the latter was conducted, and the methods by which it was controlled, with a facility which would have been impossible had the impressive rows of folios and files in the present Strong Room of the Lands Department been obliged to speak for themselves.
For many years before the granting of responsible government in 1856, most of the business connected with the survey, sale and management of crown lands had been conducted by the Surveyor-General's Office and the Commissioners for Crown Lands Office. The Office of the Surveyor-General, in particular, was an institution of long standing, and from small beginnings it had expanded as the settlement prospered. In its earliest years an informal organisation held together by the personal supervision of the Surveyor-General had sufficed; but the satisfactory working of the large department which had come into existence by 1855 necessitated (in the first instance) the sacrifice in some degree of the personal oversight which the Surveyor-General had exercised, and (as a corollary of this delegation of authority) a clearer definition of the organisation within the office itself. Unfortunately, such adjustments had been only imperfectly carried out, and when the Commission of Inquiry made its investigations in 1855, it found much that was disturbing.

The clerical work of the department was divided between eight permanent members of the staff, and some nine or ten 'extra' (i.e. temporary) clerks who made up the strength of the sections. Each of the permanent employees had a particular sphere of activity; thus, for example, one clerk was responsible for "copying and accounts," another for "copying letters," and another for "correspondence." But it is an interesting feature of the office organisation that little progress seems to have been made towards the

4. New South Wales, Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 1855, Vol.II. Report from the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Surveyor General's Department, with Minutes of Evidence and Appendix.
formal division of the clerical staff into sections, each with a well defined function. Only after some persistent questioning did the chief clerk yield the information that, in his estimation, the clerical branch might be considered as divided into four - records, correspondence (i.e. copying and issuing letters, and attaching to accounts), sale of land, and leases. From the nature of his previous replies, there is every reason to suspect that little thought had been given to the matter and that such arrangements as existed were probably unofficial and certainly informal.

The volume of correspondence with which the clerks had to deal was considerable, and papers usually made an elaborate progress through the department.

As letters were received, they were opened by the chief clerk, read through, and then sent to the registry, which controlled the receipt, transmission and issue of letters for the whole department. After registration the record clerk put each letter (together with any former papers which might be relevant to the current business) into envelopes marked 'Colonial Secretary', 'Surveyors', 'Private Individuals' as the case might be, and sent them up to the Surveyor-General. With this, the papers began their movement through the department.

No minutes were added or précis made before the papers were despatched; thus, when the envelopes of letters reached the Surveyor-General, he received nothing more than the latest mail, together with
such supporting documents as the record clerk thought necessary. 5.

After having read through the letters, the Surveyor-General endorsed those which dealt with surveys and the 'general business of the office' for the attention of the deputy Surveyor-General, while those which were concerned with financial matters were returned to the chief clerk.

From this point, the letters were distributed among the ordinary clerks for attention, and they remained in circulation - not only within the Surveyor-General's Office, but moving also to other departments as the need arose - until action had been completed. There is nothing now to indicate how their movement was controlled or the routine by which they were moved from one section to another within the office. The former may well have taken the shape of pencil notations made in the register alongside the entry for the paper in question; the general character of the departmental organisation lends support to the presumption that papers which required the attention of more than one section or clerk would be returned at each stage to the deputy Surveyor-General (or to the chief clerk, if the matter had been a financial one).

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5. This raises the question, which at present it is impossible to answer, as to what happened when the 'former' papers were still 'in action'. Under a less centralised system than the one which prevailed in the Surveyor-General's Office, it would have been possible simply to transmit the latest paper to the clerk concerned, who would then add it to the file of papers already in existence. But under prevailing circumstances, it seems inevitable that it would have been necessary to withdraw papers from action, temporarily, if the Surveyor-General were to be fully informed on any particular matter.
When action was completed, the papers which had been distributed by him were returned to the deputy Surveyor-General. If he felt competent to assess the information and advice supplied by the clerks, the papers would then be returned to the chief clerk for the framing of such replies as were indicated; if the matter seemed sufficiently important or difficult, however, the papers would first be submitted to the Surveyor-General for his decision, before being returned to the chief clerk.

Drafts of those outward letters which dealt with 'difficult' matters, or which required "historical recollection", were prepared by the chief clerk himself; simpler cases were referred to the correspondence clerk, "a gentleman of literary taste", from Trinity College, Dublin. These drafts were submitted to the Surveyor-General, and those of which he approved, he initialled and sent back to the chief clerk. A fair copy of each letter was then made by the copying section. Once more, this was submitted to the Surveyor-General for his approval and signature, before being returned to the chief clerk for despatch. Finally, the text of each reply was recorded in a letter-book by the entry clerk.

Although blurred in places, the picture which emerges from this inquiry is an interesting one. Perhaps the most striking feature is the contrast between the effectiveness of the mechanical means devised for the control of correspondence, and the unsuitability of the arrangements made for the conduct of business arising out of the correspondence. For the characteristically elaborate registry
procedure, the Board of Inquiry had nothing but praise, but they were
quick to criticise the 'cumbersome' and 'voluminous' nature of the
clerical work. This, they complained, caused much needless expense,
though the amount of correspondence (and, therefore, registry work)
to which it gave rise. "The ordinary correspondence," ran the
Report, "even such as relates to matters of detail or routine, and
which might be dealt with at once, and without further delay, by the
first officer to whom it is submitted - seems, in all cases, to pass
through several hands. The laborious and complex character of this
system is not its only fault; for it tends so much to divide respon-
sibility that, in some cases, it would be difficult to determine upon
what officer the responsibility should really rest." 6.

The situation of which they so justly complained stemmed almost
entirely from the fact that office routine revolved round the Surveyor-
General, as head of the department. There seems to be little doubt
that this practice was a legacy from earlier years when the office had
been sufficiently small to allow the head of the department to preside
personally over all its operations. When feasible, as it had been
thirty years previously, it was a practice which had something to
recommend it, and in another thirty years' time, the extent to which the
departmental head had become unaware of the business going forward in
his own office was to be the occasion of severe criticism. One merit
of the existing arrangements was that each transaction was reviewed twice
at the very least; as the papers connected with it entered and left
the office.

New South Wales,
Report from the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Surveyor-
General's Department, p.13.
But, as matters stood in 1855, the notion of a completely centralised office routine was no longer compatible with the volume of business which the department was being called upon to transact, and the continuation of the tradition exercised a pernicious influence on the development of the office as a satisfactory administrative machine.

Such channels of communication as existed within the office were well enough defined, but they had grown haphazardly and were not without blemishes. Moreover, they may be said to have run vertically through the pyramid represented by the office organisation, in the sense that correspondence appears to have moved only from superior to subordinate and from subordinate to superior at every stage of its progress. This meant the channels were exposed to the danger of being clogged by excessive (and unnecessary) movement of papers. Excessive movement of papers meant, in turn, that not only were the papers themselves exposed to all the hazards of transmission, but also that the transaction of business was liable to frequent interruption and delay. Complaints which might ensue merely subjected the elaborate registry methods to unnecessary strain and added to the existing congestion.

7. For example, the distribution of letters through the deputy Surveyor-General and the chief clerk not only weakened the position of the latter as head of the clerical section, but also added one more stage to the journey of papers through the office.
During the two and a half years which elapsed between one inquiry and the next, some important changes occurred in the structure of the administrative system. The granting of responsible government had brought the establishment of four Ministerial Departments—those of the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General, the Colonial Treasurer, and the Secretary for Lands and Public Works. To some extent, these departments were agglomerations of existing instrumentalities. Thus the Secretary for Lands and Public Works took under his charge not only the existing departments of the Colonial Architect and the Agent for Church and School Estates, but also the Surveyor-General’s Office and the Commissioners of Crown Lands. Direction of the various subordinate agencies which made up the strength of the Department of Lands and Public Works was vested in a new organisation—the Ministerial Office. This, which stood in the same relation to the instrumentalities under its control as had the Colonial Secretary’s Department before the granting of responsible government, accommodated the Secretary, the Under Secretary, three ordinary clerks and two record and entry clerks.

That is to say, in the words of the Gazette notice: "Instead of communicating only with the Colonial Secretary, as has hitherto been the practice, with reference to all matters requiring the action or decision of the Government, the particular Minister to whose department, under the foregoing arrangement, the business may belong, should be addressed; and he will convey the necessary instruction or reply to the department or person concerned."

Important as these changes were, however, they were not such as to necessitate any radical changes in the economy of the numerous dependent agencies which now found themselves brought together into one of the four groups. And yet, for reasons which must remain conjectural, we find some modifications being made at this time in the administrative relationship between the Surveyor-General's Office and that of the Commissioners of Crown Lands. The Crown Lands Office was amalgamated with that of the Surveyor-General. Financial matters were merged, and one accountant (of the Crown Lands Office) became subordinate to the other. But while Halloran, the chief clerk of the Surveyor-General's Office, assumed general oversight of the business of the combined offices, the clerical staff of the Crown Lands Office retained a just sufficiently separate identity to add one more troublesome element to the already cumbersome office routine.

Meanwhile, the administrative arrangements which had been gazetted in October 1856 had not gone unchallenged. After a lengthy debate in the Legislative Assembly on 20 April 1858, it was decided that a Select Committee should be appointed to investigate retrenchment in the Public Service. On the same day, another Select Committee was appointed to investigate the working of the Customs Department, and ten days later yet another was formed with the title of "The Select Committee on the management of the Survey Department." 9.

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It appears from the evidence collected by this Committee that the Surveyor-General had done little to formalize the internal arrangement of his Office. Thus, when questioned in 1858, J. Thompson, the deputy Surveyor-General, was uncertain of the number of branches into which the Office as a whole might be considered as being divided; the chief clerk now listed the clerical branch as being divided into only three of the four sections which had existed hitherto; the entry and despatch clerk, on the other hand, stated with some feeling that "There have been so many alterations made that we now scarcely know what branches [i.e. sections of the clerical branch] we are in." 10.

From the outset George Barney, the Surveyor-General, had shown himself anxious to secure some simplification in the routine by which correspondence moved through the office. Scarcely more than two weeks after he became Surveyor-General, Barney wrote an instruction as follows:

"Ordinary correspondence, and such as relates to matters of detail or routine, [is] to be dealt with at once by the first officer to whom it is submitted: indeed every possible method must be adopted for saving labor." 11. This, to judge from its vagueness, was meant to be little more than a gesture, but something of the intention behind it is made clear by such changes in the existing practices as can be detected. For example:

(1) After registration, the letters which had been received were no longer sent first to the Surveyor-General and then returned by him to

10. Ibid., Minutes of evidence, pp. 50, 91, 118, 162.
11. Ibid., Minutes of evidence, p.103.
either the deputy Surveyor-General or the chief clerk, but were immediately distributed for action by the chief clerk. Not only did this reduce the bulk of papers which were moving about the office, but it also made more definite the position of the chief clerk in the chain of communication.

(2) Drafts of replies (which had hitherto accounted for considerable clerical labour and movement of papers) were dispensed with, and only the fair copies were transmitted to the Surveyor-General for his signature.

(3) A greater use was made of printed letters and circulars.

(4) An experiment was made with the method (then apparently in vogue in "merchant's offices") of copying letters by "impression." Halloran, however, was not disposed to continue this practice on the grounds that imperfect impressions were not uncommon, and that ministerial departments in England had not adopted the technique.

Undoubtedly, these were valuable innovations, but by the time of the investigation which took place in April 1858, they affected only a proportion of the correspondence which passed through the Survey Office. As far as the clerical business of the Survey Office alone was concerned, many causes of that "circumlocution" which had been so severely criticised in 1855, had been removed. It must be remembered, however, that the Surveyor-General's Office and that of the Commissioner of Crown Lands were coming to be regarded as forming together a single branch.

(Survey and Management of Crown Lands) of the Department of Lands and Public Works. By the beginning of 1858, one official filled the positions of Surveyor-General and Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands, one chief clerk superintended the clerical work of both offices, and one registry controlled all the correspondence. Yet the integration had not been as complete as this might suggest; the Crown Lands clerical establishment, although reduced in numbers, still retained some aspects of an independent office, with a routine of its own. Thus while the clerical business connected with survey work moved through a simplified routine, this stream of papers was joined, through the registry and at the level of the chief clerk, by another which followed a different and more elaborate procedure.

In this second case, letters which were received from the numerous Commissioners of Crown Lands came first to the chief clerk and were sent by him to the record clerk for registration, indexing and connection with former papers. These were then returned to the chief clerk, who in turn submitted them to Barney, in his capacity as Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands. After examination, the papers were sent to the senior clerk in the Crown Lands Office for a report on the case. If the report were approved by the chief clerk (to whom the papers had, in the meantime, been transmitted by the senior clerk), then the papers would again return to the senior clerk for a reply to be written. This was a system which re-introduced into the Survey and Management Branch some of the worst features of the routine which had been followed in the Survey Office in 1855, and it

13. Ibid., Minutes of evidence, p.130.
was not until 1859 that a further re-organisation of the Branch opened up the possibility of a complete integration of the two sets of procedure.

As far as the department as a whole was concerned, the most comprehensive change occurred in October 1859 when the 'public works' aspects of its responsibilities were detached and given into the care of a newly created Department of Works. The structure of what was now called the Department of Lands consisted of the Ministerial Office (which accommodated the Under Secretary, the chief clerk, three correspondence clerks and two record clerks), and several subordinate branches, each dependent in varying degree on the central or head office. Of these branches, the principal one (and the one with which we have been concerned to date) was the Survey and Management of Crown Lands Branch.

This, it will be remembered, had been formed from an amalgamation of the former Surveyor-General's Office and the Crown Land Commissioner's Office - a process which had been partially completed by the time of the 1858 Inquiry. The amalgamation was taken to its furthest limits during 1859, but towards the end of that year, the Commissioners of Crown Lands re-appear as a separate instrumentality, though as yet with no clerical staff of its own. By the end of 1860, however, the Occupation of Crown Lands Branch (as the Office of the Commissioners came to be called) was strengthened by the transfer of five clerks from the Ministerial Office. Thus equipped, the Branch began to develop along lines which brought an increasing degree of autonomy. In
September 1878, it was transferred to the Department of Mines, shortly before the Commission of 1878 began its investigation into the management of the Lands Department.

As a preface to the work of that Commission, then, and to link its findings with that of the Select Committee of 1858, it is necessary only to examine the administrative developments which took place between 1860 and 1877 in connection with the Ministerial Office of the Department and with the Survey Branch.

In November 1866, John Bowie Wilson (Secretary for Lands) introduced the estimates for his Department with the statement that "a plan of re-organisation" had been completed for the Lands Department, and that it would come into operation at the beginning of 1867. "The work would be placed," he said, "under one head, thus doing away with a great deal of correspondence between the branches, obviating much delay, and tending to increase the capability for work." Translated into more concrete terms, the plan took the following shape.

It was intended that the Survey Branch should be relieved of as many 'non-professional' responsibilities as possible; a handful of clerks was retained, but merely for the purpose of corresponding with surveyors in the field. Correspondence with the public (and with

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1Li. S.M.H., 30 November 1866, p.4. Report of proceedings in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly on 29 November 1866.
other departments) on survey matters, as well as on all other matters previously dealt with by the Ministerial Office, was now to be conducted entirely by the latter. Accordingly, a number of clerks were transferred from the Survey Branch to the Ministerial Office. This office was now subdivided into a number of clerical branches.

Under Secretary.

Senior Chief Clerk (formerly Chief clerk in the Ministerial Office)

Junior Chief Clerk (formerly Chief clerk in the Survey Branch)

1. Ministerial Branch.

2. Deeds Branch.

3. Roads Branch.

4. Alienation and Lease Branch.

5. Miscellaneous Branch.

Records Branch.

Entry Branch.

All the departmental correspondence was controlled by a single registry, which was divided into five sections, each dealing with the correspondence of one of the five branches numbered above.

These arrangements made in 1867 established the type of departmental organisation which persisted throughout the rest of the period covered by this inquiry, with but one notable exception. The exception is to be found in the later history of the Alienation Branch, or, as it was called after 1873, the Conditional Sales Branch.

The extent to which the business of the Lands Department generally was increased by the Lands Act Amendment Act of 1875 is clearly revealed
in the number of additions made to the clerical strength (both temporary and permanent) of the department after July 1875. Each of the clerical branches was affected in some way, but none more so than the Conditional Sales Branch, whose size and importance now began to increase in spectacular fashion.

The situation was met by an interesting proposal from the Under Secretary, which largely followed the precedent set in the case of the Occupation of Lands Branch. He suggested "That the conduct of the conditional purchase business - Correspondence, &c. - (which has attained the dimensions of a department in itself almost) be delegated .... to the chief clerk, who took the title of Chief Commissioner of Conditional Sales who should submit all papers to the Minister, carry out his decisions without reference to the Under Secretary, and be the recognized medium of communication with the public and officers concerned in all matters connected with the business so entrusted to him." This arrangement, it was emphasised, should not disturb either the position of the Under Secretary as head of the whole department, or the relative position and seniority of any of the officers of the respective branches. Moreover, all matters of a 'ministerial' or 'financial' nature, appointments, promotions etc. were to be submitted as usual through the Under Secretary to the Minister.

Nevertheless, once the scheme was adopted the Conditional Sales Branch occupied a privileged position. In the execution of its routine work, and in the management of many aspects of its own economy, it was responsible only to the Secretary; its permanent head, the Chief Commissioner of Conditional Sales, had direct access to the Minister; and although still dependent on the registry which served all branches of the Department, the Conditional Sales Branch communicated directly with the public.

While this arrangement undoubtedly relieved some of the pressure on the existing channels of communication within the department, it did so at the cost of creating a distorted and unwieldy organisation, and also of giving an air of independence to the largest and most swiftly growing branch within the department. This was a clumsy and dangerous expedient. It would have been remarkable if the sense of cohesion within the department had not been impaired, and the authority of the Under Secretary, as permanent head of the whole department, gradually undermined.

In October 1878, a Commission began to investigate the management of two important parts of the Lands Department - the Ministerial Office (referred to variously as the "Lands Department" or the "Under-Secretary's Division") and the Survey Branch (by now frequently called the "Survey Department").

On the structure and routine of the department the views of the Commissioners were very definite. "The internal economy of the Department," they reported, "is exceedingly defective, more especially in reference to the record and supervision of current business." To emphasise the point, they added that in their opinion "it would be an extravagant fiction to apply such terms as discipline or system to the Department." 17. These are severe strictures; how far were they merited?

Thanks to the existing arrangements, a large proportion of the correspondence moved in one of two separate orbits, round two registries

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17. Ibid., Report, p.5.
Mail was received every morning in the General Records Branch at about 9.15. It was immediately opened by the clerk in charge and passed to another clerk who sorted it (according to subject-matter) for distribution to one of the five sections into which the registry was divided. Here, the papers went through a process of registration which was very similar to that already described for 1857. When the index entries had been completed and former papers attached to the newly received letters, the mail was ready for distribution. Cases which the clerk in charge had already classified as urgent were then transmitted directly to the Under-Secretary; ordinary matters proceeded to the head of the appropriate branch. The day's batch of inwards letters rarely left the record room before noon, but it was a standing rule that they must at any rate reach the heads of branches on the same day.

When the files of papers reached the head of a particular branch, two preliminaries had to be completed before the correspondence moved forward for the attention of the clerks. Firstly, the papers were re-examined for cases which appeared to be urgent or in any way out of the ordinary. Any such were immediately transmitted to the Under Secretary to be minuted and sent on to the Secretary; on these occasions the head of the branch wrote no preliminary memorandum but left the matter entirely to the discretion of the Under Secretary. Secondly, letters which would apparently give rise to protracted business were acknowledged by the despatch of small printed forms, stating that the business would be attended to as soon as possible; these acknowledgements were supposed to be sent out on the same day as the letter had been received.
Not all papers, of course, remained in the branch to which they had been sent originally. Sometimes it was necessary to refer them to other departments for specialised information or assistance and, more frequently, they had to be transmitted for similar reasons from branch to branch within the Lands Department itself. Each branch had its own section of the registry which controlled every movement of its papers. Papers were transmitted to other departments by means of Blank Covers, while the movement of papers from branch to branch within the Lands Department was recorded by pencil notations in the Remarks column of the register; these notations were erased as soon as the papers passed through the registry on their way back to their own branch.

As soon as sufficient information had been gathered in connection with a particular case, the head of the branch wrote his recommendation. If the case could be regarded as an ordinary one, the clerk wrote and signed the reply as well. But in practice it seems that a very high proportion of the replies drafted by each of the clerical branches were sent (via the registry) to the Under Secretary for his approval and (eventually) his signature.

Papers which had to be referred to the Secretary by the Under Secretary were placed in a special pigeon-hole in the latter's office by a clerk from the Ministerial Branch, whose special function it was to look after the Under Secretary's papers. The Secretary returned them by a special messenger and they were put on a side-table in the Under Secretary's Office. The assistant clerk then returned them to
the appropriate section of the General Records Branch where the notation in the register would be erased and the papers returned to their original branch.

We must assume, since the minutes of evidence are silent on this point, that letters in reply were written out in the appropriate clerical branch, sent to the registry for recording and copying (by impression) and then either despatched over the signature of the head of the clerical branch, or sent up for signature by the Under Secretary.

One aspect of these arrangements invites comparison with the situation which existed twenty years previously. In such a large and unwieldy department, the Under Secretary had found it necessary to sacrifice much of the direct supervision which he had once exercised. The process had continued slowly and with benefit until the present Under Secretary, W.W. Stephen, introduced his scheme for the partial separation of the Conditional Sales Branch from the rest of the 'administrative' portion of the Lands Department.

Since then a whole class of business was removed from his oversight; something in the order of half of the total correspondence which circulated through the Lands Department in the course of a year was never likely to come before him, regardless of whether or not it contained 'important' or 'unusual' cases. This, of course, was

18. Ibid., Minutes of evidence, pp. 5, 6, 7, 18, 24, 39, 93.
a serious enough hemish, but the step might have been justified if it had successfully relieved the Under Secretary of the immense amount of work with which he had been faced for some years. In fact, it did nothing of the kind. The volume of correspondence which still required his attention remained larger than could be effectively dealt with by any one official.

Since the time of George Barney, the tendency had been for the permanent head to withdraw steadily from any connection with the routine aspects of the administration of departmental correspondence. The receipt, classification, circulation and final minuting of letters were intended to take place quite outside his view. Not until it reached the final stage of progress through the office did the bulk of correspondence arrive on his desk.

This was not a development which the Commissioners viewed with sympathy, for it seemed to them essential that the Under Secretary should be thoroughly acquainted with the business currently moving through his department. They were disconcerted, accordingly, to find that it should be "quite possible for a matter of business to be in the office for some days without your [the Under Secretary's] knowing anything about it." 19. To them it seemed very desirable that the Under Secretary should acquire a most intimate knowledge of the correspondence from the beginning, and to this end, they suggested more than once that the Under Secretary should consider reviving the old practice

of opening and classifying the correspondence (i.e. sorting it into 'urgent' and 'routine') himself. They seem to have been prepared to support any type of reform, or to endorse the appointment of extra assistance, if by such means the Under Secretary could be brought back (as they saw it) into the main stream of departmental business.

Stated in its broadest terms, the problem appears as a curious lack of balance between the arrangements for the receipt and the issue of letters. As the volume of incoming letters grew, an elaborate organisation (involving some specialisation in function) had been found necessary to take charge of them. But the dispersal of responsibility which this procedure represented had not been matched by similar arrangements for the issue of the equally voluminous replies to which these letters gave rise. While much of the preliminary work was done in the various clerical branches, and while many of the replies were even framed there, an extremely high proportion of this extensive correspondence poured into the Under Secretary's office for his scrutiny, approval or signature. It is not surprising that what was virtually the only outlet for letters to the public should have become congested, and that replies should have often received an examination which was less than satisfactory.

It was legitimate to criticise the present arrangements for sifting the correspondence, and the Commissioners were wise in deprecating the use of expedients which resulted in whole classes of business being removed from the Under Secretary's oversight. But they were wrong to criticise the motives which had inspired them. If the corres-
pondence was not receiving the attention from the Under Secretary which it deserved (and this was the implication of their remarks), the reason was not that the Under Secretary had escaped too far from the routine administration of correspondence, but that he had not escaped far enough.

That there is much in these details to interest an archivist is almost too obvious to require demonstration. Few archivists would challenge the proposition that in investigating the character of a particular body of records the first and most profitable line of inquiry is to examine the instrumentality which created them. There is nothing new in the suggestion that internal lines of communication, delegation of authority, and specialised functions of clerks are all matters of the keenest interest in elucidating the structure and contents of archives, and as such affect archivist and student public alike. Influences like these have moulded many internal and external characteristics of the archives we have inherited from departments of state. But to pursue inquiries into the structure of modern departments at the level required to be able to trace the progress of individual papers through an office is (as the case of the New South Wales Lands Department suggests) likely to be a formidable undertaking. And here, the printed reports of three official inquiries have permitted the archivist largely to dispense with the evidence supplied by minutes and marginal notations on the records themselves. In the case of
most departments, the illumination is likely to be briefer and the details of the story less accessible than they were for the Lands Department.

Moreover, for every case examined in the course of official inquiries, there are others which remain to be puzzled out from the archives themselves. The Commonwealth Department of External Affairs, for example, was at no time the object of an official inquiry into its structure and routine. Staff Lists and Estimates provide a useful enough outline of its career, beginning with the permanent head and clerk who were appointed in January 1901 and ending with the larger and more complicated organisation which existed just before the abolition of the Department in 1916. According to these sources, the Department comprised a permanent head and clerical officers of various grades who were divided into the staff of the Central Office proper and that of the Northern Territory Branch. In addition the staff of the High Commissioner's Office, London, also came under the administrative oversight of the Department, which had provided some of the clerical staff in London. This picture is admirable, as far as it goes; but it is only from the records themselves that the commanding position of the Secretary becomes apparent, and only from the same source can we learn that the Department, for the purposes of current business, was divided not into two sections but into twelve, each with a definite sphere of activity and each with its core of specialised officers, occupying a distinctive place in the routine of the Department.

But if we move into the Commonwealth period and turn to the
Commonwealth itself, it is not the development of any one department which presents an interesting object-lesson for the archivist so much as the functioning of a new piece of administrative machinery and the inconsistencies which marked the progress of its development, even within the short period from Federation to the outbreak of the First World War.

Section 65 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act prescribes that "Until the Parliament otherwise provides, the Ministers of State shall not exceed seven in number ..."; and to this extent, the outline of the new administrative arrangements was already determined before the Commonwealth Public Service was called into being. Five Commonwealth departments were created on 1 January 1901, and of these four were 'new' departments (Home Affairs, External Affairs, Treasury and Attorney-General's) and one - Trade and Customs - was a 'transferred' department. The two remaining (Postmaster-General's and Defence) were transferred from the States to the Commonwealth on 1 March.

Late in 1900, a preliminary scheme for the distribution of administrative responsibilities between the seven proposed departments had been drawn up, and the details of this plan have been preserved by a typescript list now among the Barton Papers in the Commonwealth National Library:

20. The administrative responsibilities listed were those which it was felt would either immediately or in the near future fall within the sphere of Commonwealth activity. In some cases (e.g. Old Age Pensions, The Interstate Commission, Light-houses) this expectation proved incorrect.
External Affairs

Fisheries - extra-territorial.
Naturalization and aliens.
Immigration and emigration.
Influx of criminals.
High Commissioner.
External Affairs.
Pacific Islands.
Governor-General and Executive Council offices.
Officers of Parliament.

Home Affairs.

Old Age Pensions.
People of Special Races.
Acquisition of Property.
Acquisition of Railways
   (with State consent).
Construction of Railways
   (with State consent).
Astronomy.
Census and Statistics.
Federal Capital.
Interstate Commission.
Elections.

Treasury.

Taxation (exclusive of customs).
Public Loans (and taking over of State loans).
Currency.
Banking.
Insurance.

Attorney-General

Bills of exchange.
Bankruptcy.
Foreign corporations.
Marriage.
Divorce.
Service of process.
Recognition of laws.

Defence.

Naval and Military Defence.
Control of Railways for Defence.

Trade and Customs.

Trade and Commerce.
Commonwealth Bounties.
Customs and Excise.
Patents.
Conciliation and Arbitration.
Lighthouses.
Quarantine.
Weights and Measures.

Postmaster-General.

Posts.
Telegraphs.
Telephones.

This, essentially, is the pattern which early administrative organisation followed, and by the end of 1901, the simple framework had been completed. The 'new' Commonwealth Departments were small in size, and while the former colonial departments connected with Trade and Customs, and the former state departments of Posts and Telegraphs and Defence retained their large staffs, the newly established central offices by which these staffs were now controlled followed the same
modest proportions as the other creations of the Commonwealth. At the head of this organisation stood the Department of External Affairs, with the Prime Minister as ministerial head. This department, to which was attached the Office of the (Official) Secretary to the Governor-General, acted as the channel of communication between the Commonwealth and other governments.

Between 1901 and 1906, the organisation of Commonwealth government became more elaborate, a development due partly to the addition of new spheres of activity and partly to an increasing volume of well established classes of business. No further departments were established, but there was a marked inclination to establish within the 'new' departments and the central offices of the 'transferred' departments a number of branches and sections which dealt with more specialised aspects of departmental business. An early development, of course, was the division of the central office of a department into 'Accounts', 'Correspondence', and 'Records' sections. But more important in the development of departmental organisation was the appearance of branches which dealt with particular spheres of business. In 1901, two such branches were established; the Electoral Branch being created in the Department of Home Affairs and the Audit Branch in the Department of the Treasury. Two years later, the semi-autonomous Office of the Public Service Commissioner was attached to Home Affairs, while the appointment of a Commonwealth Crown Solicitor led to the establishment of a separate Crown Solicitor's Office within the Attorney-General's Department. In 1904, the effects of new legislation resulted in the creation of a Patents Branch as part of the central
office of the Department of Trade and Customs, while the central office of the Defence Department was re-organised to include a separate Office of the Naval Commandant. Another subdivision was added to the organisation of Treasury when, towards the end of 1905, a separate staff was created for the Printing Office. Finally, in 1906, the central office of Trade and Customs was considerably enlarged by the creation of three new Branches - Statistical, Trade Marks and Copyright.

At the end of 1906, the first set of Administrative Arrangements appeared in the Commonwealth Gazette. The preparation of this table not only illustrated the nature of the new business which had been brought into the Commonwealth sphere during the previous six years, but also provided the occasion for the first amendments to the distribution of administrative responsibilities, as this had been laid down in 1901.

As a result of new legislation, a number of new functions had been added to the original list. Administration of the Commonwealth Franchise, Governor-General's Residences, Lands Acquisition, Public Service, Referendum (Constitutional Alteration) and Representation of the People Acts had been allotted to the Department of Home Affairs; the Conciliation and Arbitration and the Rules Publication Acts had been placed under the Attorney-General; External Affairs had acquired the Extradition, Papua and Royal Commission Acts; while the business of the Department of Trade and Customs had been extended to include the Designs, Copyright and Trade Marks Acts.
Some modest adjustments were made to the original distribution of administrative responsibilities. Home Affairs lost three actual or anticipated functions; one, Old Age Pensions, went to Treasury; another, Astronomical and Meteorological Observation, was transferred to the Postmaster-General's Department; the third, "People of races (other than the aboriginal races of any State) for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws", was acquired by External Affairs.

From the beginning of 1907 to the outbreak of the first World War in 1914, the speed of development increased. The new items of legislation become too numerous to recount individually, but some idea of the direction which they took can be derived from the new branches which they called into being. Statistical, Meteorological, Lands and Survey, Railways and Afforestation, in Home Affairs; Stamp Printing, Pensions, Note Issue, Land Tax, Maternity Allowance and Note Printing, in Treasury; Radio Telegraph, in Postmaster-General's; Northern Territory, in External Affairs; a Crown Solicitor's Office (Sydney) in Attorney-General's; Designs Office, Fisheries, Analysts', Quarantine, Lighthouses and Interstate Commission in Trade and Customs; Naval and Military Boards and the Small Arms Factory Branch in Defence; all these new creations not only increased both the size of the various central offices and the complexity of their work, but in some cases (notably the Meteorological Branch of Home Affairs, the Land Tax and Pensions Branches of Treasury and the Quarantine Branch of Trade and Customs) brought regional offices of Commonwealth departments into the States.
Adjustments to the pattern of administrative arrangements came to be more commonplace. Administration of the Meteorology Act was transferred to Home Affairs from Postmaster-General's in 1907, although the Meteorologist remained on the staff of the latter department. In April 1911 the Designs, Copyright, Trade Marks and Patents Branches of Trade and Customs were transferred to Attorney-General's, and six months later, administrative responsibility for the Governor-General's Office passed from the Department of External Affairs to that of the Treasury. With legislation impending on the matter of an Inter-State Commission, formal responsibility for the latter was transferred from Home Affairs (where it had lain since 1901) to the central office of Trade and Customs.

But administratively speaking, the outstanding development of the period under discussion was the creation of a new department in 1911. The Prime Minister's Office within the Department of External Affairs had originally been conceived as the office wherein the semi-official business of the Prime Minister could be conducted by the Private Secretary. In 1904, the previous connection between the Prime Minister and the portfolio of External Affairs was severed when Watson took the Treasurership. One result of this development was that the Private Secretary came to have a closer association with the purely official business which had to be submitted to the Prime Minister. When Fisher became Prime Minister and Treasurer in the middle of 1910, this line of development was taken further, and the Private Secretary came to have charge of most classes of business which concerned Fisher as Prime Minister. A year later, the development reached an appropriate
conclusion with the establishment of a Prime Minister's Department and the elevation of the Private Secretary into Secretary and permanent head.

The activities of the new department were not confined to the transmission of business to and from the Prime Minister on behalf of other departments, state or overseas governments or private individuals. Within eighteen months of its creation, the department had grown to sizeable proportions, with two semi-autonomous Offices attached and a number of substantial functions to carry out. In 1911, it assumed responsibility for administering new legislation in the shape of the Arbitration (P.S.) Act and the Petherick Collection Act, while the Royal Commissions Act was transferred to the new department from the Department of External Affairs. During 1912, administration of the Commonwealth Public Service Act (together with the Public Service Commissioner's Office) and the Audit Act (together with the Audit Office) were acquired from Home Affairs and the Treasury respectively. The newly constituted Historic Memorials Committee was also attached administratively to the Prime Minister's Department, with the Secretary of the Department acting as Secretary to the Committee.

By the middle of 1914, then, the Commonwealth administrative system had outgrown its modest beginnings. All the functions outlined in 1901 had been taken up, although in the case of the Interstate Commission, for example, twelve years had elapsed before it became the responsibility of a Commonwealth department. To some extent, the original conception of the scope of federal activity had even been broadened, notably by the
acquisition of a number of territories (Papua, the Northern Territory and Norfolk Island) but also by the provision of such additional common services as that offered by the Commonwealth Printing Office. Many of the spheres of activity projected in 1901 had been more closely defined and Commonwealth responsibilities extended by subsequent legislation; thus, for example, the Department of Trade and Customs, already charged in 1901 with the vague administration of Patents, had this type of regulatory activity increased to include Copyright, Designs and Trademarks.

As a corollary to these developments, the departments and central offices created by the Commonwealth (and here the State branches of Trade and Customs, Postmaster-General's and Defence again are excluded from consideration) had come to include a number of branches, sections and offices of greatly varied administrative standing. A number of these arrangements rarely received official recognition, consisting as they did of nothing more than a convention that a certain clerk or clerks should specialise in certain types or aspects of departmental business. In other cases, development had passed beyond this stage and the branch or section was recognised officially as a distinct though not necessarily permanent feature of departmental organisation; examples of this type of arrangement are provided by the Northern Territory Branch of External Affairs, the Meteorological or Statistical Branches of Home Affairs, each one of which had its own graded staff, maintained its own records and could be moved intact from the administrative oversight of one department to that of another as changes in the organisation of government might dictate. Yet again, there was another class of
instrumentalities, represented by the Governor-General's Office, the Audit Office and the Office of the Public Service Commissioner, which were attached to one department or another merely for the purposes of Supply, and not because their functions related in any way to the scope of their parent department.

Certain aspects of these developments are of considerable interest to the archivist. One striking feature is the lack of uniformity in the nomenclature and degree of independence to be found among the numerous offices, divisions, branches and sections which comprised the lower levels of the Commonwealth administrative structure. In the Commonwealth Permanent Staff List, for example, the Department of External Affairs (1901 - 1916) is shown as including two distinct offices. The first of these - the Prime Minister's Office - was staffed (in practice) by the clerks of the central office of the department, by whom the records were created and in whose registry they were maintained. By contrast, the Governor-General's Office enjoyed greater administrative autonomy and possessed its own staff, who created and maintained their own records on their own initiative. Neither Office possessed the same degree of independence as did a department, since neither submitted independent Estimates. But one was so much more an independent force than the other that to regard both as nothing more than subordinate divisions of the one department would
clearly be to misrepresent the administrative context in which they functioned. For the archivist, who classifies his archives by reference to the administrative hierarchy which created them, the almost endless gradations of administrative standing not only set problems of identification and assessment, but also condemn him to following a scheme of classification which is as seemingly inconsistent as the administrative pattern on which it is based. If Jenkinson's definition of an Archive Group were applied, for example, to the cases just cited, the records of the Governor-General's Office would almost certainly qualify as an independent Group, while those of the Prime Minister's Office would remain as a subdivision of the External Affairs Group.

Again, the changes in the administrative structure take a variety of forms. Sometimes an adjustment to the Administrative Arrangements involves little more than a change of name. The conversion of the Director of Survey's Office in Canberra first to the District Surveyor's Office (a process which began just before the outbreak of war in 1914) and then to the Surveyor-General's Office, was accomplished without any change in the organisation of the Office or in the structure of its records. Such events are of interest to the archivist only in so far as they reflect a change in the level of business being transacted within the records. More important is what might be called a change of attachment. It is a commonplace of the Australian administrative scene to find a branch, an office or a section being transferred from the oversight of one agency to that of another with no alteration in

21. See below, Part III, chapter 1, p.263, 173.
its own economy. This, on the face of things, does not appear to be a noteworthy event; but for the archivist it may have considerable significance. Although certain offices or branches may each be self-contained as far as the creation and maintenance of their own records are concerned, each, if connected with a particular department or other agency, also contributes to an integrated body of records. The transfer of the Patent Office from the Department of Trade and Customs to that of the Attorney-General broke up one such body of records and prepared the way for a new one; the change left its mark on the contents of the records of the Patent Office and on those of the central offices of both departments. On each such occasion the archivist is compelled to record the event and to demonstrate its effects, since existing administrative threads have been broken and new ones put in their place.

But for the archivist, by far the most striking and perhaps the most disturbing characteristic of the structure of the modern administrative machine is the frequency with which its design is altered. In the Commonwealth, the period between 1901 and 1914 provides a clear enough example of the types of change which can occur, and because it is a period in which the functions of government were still set in modest mould, it lends itself to examination in detail. From the archivists' point of view, however, the period, though troublesome enough, scarcely does justice to the scale of the problem which has to be faced. Between 1914 and 1939, for example, thirty-three departments were created and fifteen abolished, with the administration of primary industries (to mention one outstanding case) passing through
Indeed, between 1901 and 1960, the original seven departments grew to eight by 1914, eighteen by the end of 1939, twenty-eight by the end of 1945, with twenty-one in existence at the present time. At a lower level of administrative organisation offices, branches and sections; boards, committees and commissions have been created, abandoned or amalgamated on a far greater scale. 22. Since 1901, scarcely a year has passed without some change in the structure of government or some re-distribution of administrative responsibilities. Here is a situation which quite clearly presents its own problems of research and presentation, problems whose very scale and complexity make them something of a novelty in the archivist's experience. But this is not all. What is to be said of the archives created in such an environment?

22. It is worth noting that in the period 1901-1960, over five hundred and fifty non-departmental agencies have so far been identified.
3. THE MOBILITY OF RECORDS.

To many present at Canberra in 1954, the records which had then begun to enter the repositories in some numbers seemed to be a mass of material utterly confused in its construction, attributable in one sense to certain departments of the day, but often hinting at other administrative allegiances and other registry connections. So perplexing did the situation seem, so difficult to discern was the orderly hierarchy of Group, Series and Items referred to in the Manuals of Instruction, that many questioned the applicability of accepted means of arrangement and description to such a body of material. In fact, of course, such pessimism was quite misplaced. The character and structure of Australian departmental records have been shaped by the influence of the three factors - systems of control, the organisation of individual departments and the pattern of administrative arrangements - which have always determined the characteristics of any body of departmental archives. It is simply that in recent times methods of controlling records have become more diverse; the organisation of individual departments has become more elaborate; and both have come to evolve with increasing speed. The same is true of the structure of government as a whole, and an unprecedented degree of elaboration and reconstruction has left its own mark on the body of records which the administrative apparatus has called into being.

Not every adjustment to the administrative arrangements has gravely disturbed the structure of records. In some cases, changes have portended little more than a change of name, with the series of records
CHART II

HOME AFFAIRS

1912
1915
1917
1919
1920
1921
1922
1923
1924
1925
1926
1927
1928
1930

HOME AND TERRITORIES

WORKS AND RAILWAYS

FEDERAL CAPITAL COMMISSION
inherited from a superseded instrumentality being maintained in their original pattern. Again, an office may enjoy a high degree of autonomy and be transferred from the administrative oversight of one department to that of another with little or no effect on the structure or composition of its own records. But more often than not, a change in the administrative arrangements has prompted either the transfer of records from one series to another, or the creation of a new series, or the establishment of a new registry, or all three. Something of these processes at work can be seen clearly in the history of the machinery of local administration in the Capital Territory between 1912 and 1932, a history which illustrates the effects of changes in administrative machinery on the structure of the records by which it is served. (see Chart II).

The Seat of Government (Administration) Act was passed in 1910, but its proclamation was delayed until 1 January in the following year. By that time, the Department of Home Affairs had begun to make arrangements for discharging its new responsibilities at the capital site. During 1910, T.P.Owen (the Commonwealth Director-General of Works) and T.Hill (the Works Director for Victoria) had made an exploratory visit to the district and had decided that Hill, for the time being, should communicate directly with the Director of Surveys at the site, and should divide his time between the Federal Capital Territory and Victoria. While these activities were taking place, the impending volume of work connected with the acquisition and survey of land was

causing some concern. At the beginning of 1910, the appointment of a Commonwealth Director of Lands and Surveys had been proposed. Negotiations took up the rest of the year, but in January 1911 Scrivener (who had already been conducting surveys at the site) was appointed to the new position and placed at the head of the newly formed Land and Property Branch of the Department of Home Affairs.

Later in the year, Scrivener and most of his staff of surveyors and draftsmen removed themselves to the Capital Territory, where they joined a Paying Officer and Collector of Public Moneys who had been there since the previous December. In June, the temporary arrangement decided on between Owen and Hill was made permanent; the latter took the title of Principal Assistant Engineer (in addition to that of Works Director, Victoria) and travelled frequently between Melbourne and the site. Owen himself visited the scene of operations less often. Finally, in September 1912, an unforeseen development took place. The Secretary of the department, Colonel David Miller, was transferred to the Capital Territory and, having taken the title of Administrator, set himself up as the head of the local administration and began to build a Residency.

By the beginning of the first World War, then, a complete, hierarchical administration was in operation at Canberra. At its head


came the Administrator, to whom all local officers were immediately responsible and through whom they communicated with Melbourne and elsewhere on all but the most trivial matters. The Administrator's staff was a small one; indeed the clerical work seems to have been carried out by the staff of the local office of the Accounts Branch, an arrangement which emphasises the close connection which existed between these two sections of the administration. For the Administrator's work, a single series of correspondence files sufficed, supported by a set of registers and indexes (see Chart II); the Accounts Branch, on the other hand, had already created a profusion of records, most of which were notable more for their originality of form than for their usefulness. The executive arm of the administration was provided by the local offices of the Lands and Surveys and the Public Works Branches. The first was a formidable affair. No less a person than the Director-General of Lands and Surveys had made his headquarters at the site and his staff there consisted of at least five surveyors, an inspector, three draftsmen and two or three clerks. An elaborate set of records was maintained; these included not only formal documents connected with the acquisition and lease of land, but also a complete registry of correspondence records—files, registers and a card index. The Public Works office, on the other hand, was the victim of ambitious plans for organisation and expansion which never materialised. By 1914, the professional staff numbered no more than six. Clerical duties were light. Only the most rudimentary series

4. Details of the staff employed at the site before and during the first World War have been compiled from a series of staff files now in the custody of the Commonwealth Archives Office, and maintained as accession C.T. 85.
of records were kept and almost all the correspondence was conducted by
the clerks of the Lands and Surveys Branch.

Communications from Canberra to the department in Melbourne
arrived at one of three points in the head office. Letters would be
despatched (from or via the Administrator) to either the Lands and
Survey Branch or the Public Works Branch, as seemed appropriate; or
for questions of general policy, to the central office of the depart-
ment, for the attention of the acting Secretary. Both of the
branches and the central office maintained their own series of 'Federal
Capital' records.

During the war, this organisation was virtually dissolved. First,
the Director of Lands and Surveys retired in January 1915, and thereupon
the position was abolished. An official known as the District
Surveyor took charge of the Canberra office and the survey work in
the Territory, but the staff of draftsmen was removed to Melbourne,
which now became the head-quarters of the Lands and Survey Branch. 5.
Then the Administrator's Office disappeared from the scene. Only
eighteen months previously, the records had been reorganised on a more
elaborate pattern. The original body of 'general' records had been
subdivided into three series, one for general matters ('G'), one to deal
with lands questions ('L') and one for the administration of public

5. C.A.O. C.P. 146, 17/2933. History and Work of the Lands and
Surveys Branch, Department of Home Affairs, n.d.

6. C.A.O. C.P. 298, Series 39, F.C.W. 17/125. Secretary, Department
of Works and Railways to Secretary, Department of Home and Territories,
7 February 1917, et passim.
works ("W") ; each had been supported by its own registers and indexes. Now, in the middle of 1916, the 'L' series of records were transferred to the Lands and Survey office where, in turn, their arrival necessitated another re-organisation of the records. The 'L' series of the Administrator were merged with the general series of 'D.S.' records which to this time had been the only correspondence series of the Lands and Survey office. This grouping was then divided into four new series - Estates ('E'), Leases ('L'), General ('G'), Survey ('S') - each of which was supported by a register and an index. The other two series from the Administrator's Office - the General ('G') and Works ('W') - were transferred almost entirely to Melbourne and there incorporated into the existing Central Office 'F.C.' series and the Public Works Branch 'F.C.W.' series respectively.

Hard on the closing down of the Administrator's Office came the abolition of the Department of Home Affairs in November 1916. Interestingly enough, this major administrative reform had less effect on the organisation of the local offices in Canberra than had the retirement of one official and the departure of another for military duty. But the new Administrative Arrangements did have one important effect at Canberra. Whereas before the end of 1916, all local officers were responsible to a common administrative superior, now at the beginning of 1917, two departments were concerned with operations at the capital site and the allegiance of the branch offices was divided. Lands and Survey officers reported to the new Department of Home and Territories, while the Accounts staff and the Public Works

officers were transferred to the other new creation - the Department of Works and Railways.

The Federal Capital undertaking recovered slowly during the early years of peace. Between 1918 and 1920, little was attempted, but the appointment in 1921 of the Federal Capital Advisory Committee was the first sign of revival. An increase of funds and an anxiety that Federal Parliament should meet in Canberra as soon as possible, opened the way to an extensive programme of public works which brought on a general quickening of activity at the site.

All works of design and construction were brought under the control of the Director-General of Works, whose branch had already taken over the Federal Capital Office, formerly the head-quarters of the staff which had worked under the direct supervision of Walter Burley Griffin. The Works Branch office at Canberra, hitherto dependent for clerical services on the staff of the Lands and Surveys Branch of the Department of Home and Territories, began its own correspondence registry, into which were absorbed records from the registry of the Lands and Surveys Branch, as well as the minor correspondence which had been kept more informally by the Public Works officers since the beginning of 1913. During 1922, the staff of the Public Works Branch steadily increased in size and standing. In January, an Acting Works Director was appointed; by the end of the year, three

8. C.A.O. C.P. 298, Series 11, F.C. 21/310. Minister for Works and Railways to Secretary, Department of Works and Railways, 15 February 1921.
clerks had been added to the strength. Moreover, two new series of records had been established, and this may indicate that the staff was by now being organised in sections. At the beginning of 1923, three more series were added to the series of general correspondence which had been created in 1921. A month later, H.M. Rolland was confirmed in his position as Works Director, and placed in charge of a staff which by now included an architect and four clerks. But this arrangement lasted for only a short period. In November 1923, Owen, the Director-General of Works, moved to Canberra and assumed control of all public works activities there; the Secretary to the Federal Capital Advisory Committee was appointed as his representative in Melbourne. This development not only augmented the resources but also increased the administrative standing of the Canberra office of the Works Branch. Under the arrangements made, Owen was directly responsible to the Minister for Works and Railways for all construction work undertaken at Canberra; moreover, the Secretary of the department delegated to Owen (in respect of all the officers of the Department of Works and Railways stationed permanently in the Capital Territory) all his powers and functions under the Commonwealth Public Service Act. For himself and for his Works Director in Canberra, Owen acquired the privilege of communicating directly on professional matters with

9. C.A.O. C.P. 298, Series 14, F.C. 21/1383. Memorandum from Director-General of Works to Secretary, Department of Works and Railways, 10 December 1921.


11. C.A.O. C.P. 298, Series 14, F.C. 24/55. Secretary, Department of Works and Railways to Minister for Works and Railways, 22 November 1923.
professional officers in Melbourne and elsewhere. By the end of 1923, the Canberra office of the Public Works Branch enjoyed a degree of administrative independence which far outran that of offices in the States and, indeed, of the head office of the Branch in Melbourne.

Earlier in the same year, the Canberra office of the Lands and Surveys Branch of the Department of Home and Territories had also been reinforced. In 1915, the then head of the Branch (the Director of Lands and Surveys) had retired, and the head-quarters of the Branch had been transferred to Melbourne, leaving the Canberra office in the charge of the District Surveyor. At the beginning of 1923, the head of the branch (now styled Commonwealth Surveyor-General) returned to Canberra, bringing with him a number of professional officers to augment the small staff already at the site.

Towards the end of 1924, the administration of the Capital site was brought under a Commission. Six months after its creation, the Federal Capital Commission had taken over nearly all the staff formerly attached to the Departments of Works and Railways and of Home and Territories, and had established a new administrative organisation. This, in many of its elements, resembled the arrangements of former years. The Lands, Accounts and Engineer's Departments recalled the old tripartite organisation, while the new Secretarial Department, with its supervisory functions, to some extent resembled the old Administrat-

12. C.A.O. C.P. 826, Series 1. Evidence provided by correspondence on files created between 1921 and 1922.

or's Office. But the new machinery was more complicated than the old. Each of the four departments was divided into a number of branches and these, in turn, might consist of several sections. The Engineer's Department, for example, was divided into seven branches, and one of these, the Architect's Branch, consisted of five sections.

The Secretarial Department provided the main clerical services for the whole organisation. One registry was established to serve all departments and the latter were only sparingly permitted to accumulate correspondence records of their own. All the series which existed at the end of 1924 were taken over. None of them were continued without change, and all were identified by new symbols. But 'Lands' records were still kept separate from those of 'Public Works', even though both were re-organised. In the former case, the old 'G' series became the Commission's 'L' series, and this was joined almost immediately by a new series of 'C.L.' records. The main series of Public Works correspondence, on the other hand, was continued without modification for the first six months of 1925; then it was terminated, and its active material taken up into two new series, 'E.1' and 'E.2'. A new set of records ('G') was created to administer the general business of the Commission.

The subsequent history of the Commission was a complicated one. The establishment of departments was varied even during the first year.

Details of the administrative structure created by the Commission between 1925 and 1928 have been taken from a collection of Organisation Circulars, C.A.O. C.P. 325, Series 1. Developments in 1929 are recorded in Organisation Instruction No. 1, 1929, in C.A.O. C.P. 698, Series 3.
of Commission activities. As early as the end of June, a Commissariat Department was created out of what had hitherto been a branch within the Lands Department. In the following October the Architect's Branch of the Engineer's Department was similarly converted into a department. In June 1925, a Building Construction Branch appeared in the Engineer's Department; a month later, this new body achieved independence as a full-scale department. Existing branches were re-distributed. In June, for example, the Stores and Supply Branch was transferred from the Engineer's Department to the Accounts Department. This scale of re-organisation was continued during 1926.

In that year a new department, three new branches and at least one new section appeared on the scene. Between July and December 1927, a new department was established; two departments were abolished, and a third drastically re-organised; the working of the Secretarial Department was overhauled and the administrative responsibilities of the Secretary re-modelled. Only six months before the Commission was abolished, the administrative arrangements were comprehensively re-organised and the results embodied in a sixty page circular.

Fortunately this procession of administrative improvements had little effect on the main correspondence records of the Commission. These were concentrated in a central registry and from this point of stability they were circulated among the departments of the day. The series of 'General' records threw out one side shoot ('C') to deal with more specialised areas of business concerning Canberra Ordinances; similarly, the 'L' series was supplemented for a short period by an 'R.L.' series, in which were concentrated records relating to the
holding of Rural Leases. But the pattern of series held by the central registry in 1930, though different from the one which the Commission inherited at the end of 1924, was not radically different from the one which the Commission fashioned during 1925.

The Federal Capital Commission came to an end in April 1930. Three years after the establishment of the Commission in 1925, a new set of Commonwealth Administrative Arrangements had been promulgated. These, among other things, had abolished the Department of Home and Territories and created, in its place, a new Department of Home Affairs. Now, in 1930, all aspects of administration at the capital site passed to the latter. As had been the case in 1925, the existing staff at Canberra was largely transferred to the new department, and concentrated in a Federal Capital Territory Branch, made up of a number of sections which corresponded roughly to the old departments of the Commission.

Between 1912 and 1932, then, the organisation of local administration in the Capital Territory had varied considerably, both in its general outline and in its details. One of the most interesting aspects of this history is the way in which changes in the Commonwealth Administrative Arrangements variously affected the local scene. In 1916, a new set of Arrangements caused a division of administrative allegiance among the local offices, but had no effect on the structure of the local organisation and the disposition of its records. In 1928, further changes made no impression at Canberra. Four years later, on the other hand, the new pattern of central government affected the entire local organisation, its staff and its records. Again, it is interest-
ing to note the number of occasions on which changes were made in the local organisation and its records as a result of the most minor administrative incidents - the appointment or retirement of an official, the visit of a Public Service Inspector - as well as the existence of changes which have no obvious explanation.

As a result of these developments, a well-defined but complicated pattern of series and registry systems was brought into being. Not only is one series related to another within the same registry system, but one system is related to another both as part of the records maintained by each department, and also as one stage in the lines of administrative succession which can be traced from 1912 to 1932. In one sense, for example, the connections of the 'D.S.' series lie, between 1912 and 1916, with the Group of records created by the Department of Home Affairs; the series even developed originally from the 'F.C.L.' records maintained at the Head Office in Melbourne. In 1917 the business formerly conducted by the 'D.S.' series and the Administrator's 'L' series was concentrated in the District Surveyor's Office, whose records were divided into four new series. These, the 'G', 'E', 'L' and 'S' series, form part of the Home and Territories Group of records, and as such enjoy connections with other series and systems maintained by that department. But, and this is important to
TABLE A
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERIES</th>
<th>LATER DISTRIBUTION OF ACTIVE PAPERS AND FILES.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D.S.'E'</td>
<td>D.S.'G' F.C.C.'R.L.' D.S.'E'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.S.'S'</td>
<td>F.C.C.'L'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Public Works'</td>
<td>W. &amp; R. 'Unprefixed'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin.</td>
<td>F.C.C.'L' Admin.'L' Admin.'G'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin.'L'</td>
<td>D.S.'G' D.S.'E'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin.'G'</td>
<td>H.A.'E'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. &amp; R. 'C'</td>
<td>F.C.C.'E 1' F.C.C.'E 2'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.C.C. 'Unprefixed'</td>
<td>F.C.C.'G' F.C.C.'F'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.C.C.'E 2'</td>
<td>H.A.'E'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.C.C.'F'</td>
<td>H.A.'G'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.C.C.'E 2'</td>
<td>H.A.'E'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.C.C.'R.L.'</td>
<td>H.A.'L'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
note, the administrative pedigree of these series is to be indicated not only in terms of records in the same Group with which they are related, but also by reference to the 'D.S.' series and the Administrator's 'L' records of the previous Department of Home Affairs from which they grew and with which they continued to be connected. The same situation occurred in 1925 when the 'L', 'G' and 'F' systems were established out of the 'G' records created by Home and Territories. These new series not only enjoyed an intricate connection as part of the Group created by the Federal Capital Commission, but they also are in a direct line of descent from the 'S', 'G', 'E', 'L' and 'D.S.' series of the Home and Territories Group. These connections, both horizontal and vertical, need to be indicated, not only in order that the arrangements for the conduct of a particular class of business may be determined at any one time, or that they may be traced from one period to another, but also to explain the composition of certain files.

Again, the constant succession of registry systems suggests another matter which has to be considered by the archivist. Not all items finish their administrative career where they started. In some cases, a paper or a file may do no more than change its position within a particular series, being 'brought up' or 'top-numbered' (to use the registry terms) to the more current parts of the series. On other occasions, however, papers or files are transferred from one series to another which is either running concurrently in the same or another department or has been created to succeed the original series. Transfers of this kind were widespread in the Canberra administration, as Table A illustrates. It indicates the direction in which papers have moved from their parent series into contemporary or subsequent seri
CHART III
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORDER OF PAPERS ON FILE</th>
<th>ORDER AND CONNECTIONS OF THE SAME PAPERS AS RECORDED BY THE REGISTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DSG 24/67</td>
<td>G25/725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCC 25/320</td>
<td>25/320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G26/187</td>
<td>G26/187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G25/725</td>
<td>G26/187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>G26/207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>G26/187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G26/107</td>
<td>G26/207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>G26/309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G27/12</td>
<td>G26/410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/10</td>
<td>G26/410</td>
</tr>
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<td>25/5</td>
<td>G26/309</td>
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<td>25/7</td>
<td>G26/410</td>
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<td>3785</td>
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<td>G27/10</td>
<td>G26/410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/3160</td>
<td>G26/410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>030/13</td>
<td>G26/410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FILE 0.30/13**

- PAPERS PRESENT ON FILE
- PAPERS NOT PRESENT ON FILE
Although there can be no question of removing such items from their present location, the fact remains that the earlier papers on a file which has been moved from the D.S.'G' series to the F.C.G.'L' series, for example, will have a number of connections with other records in the D.S.'G' series and in the systems which operated contemporaneously in that and other offices. Here, all references to the papers will be by their D.S.'G' numbers; but these references will be useless unless the present whereabouts of the D.S.'G' papers are known. Where no attempt has been made by the department or office concerned to record the movement of items from one series to another, or where such a record no longer exists, then the archivist clearly has to attempt to supply the deficiency, if the items are to be brought fully under control. Many registry systems provide such information in the register, where the columns indicating the registration numbers of 'previous' and 'subsequent' papers provide the links required to trace the sequence of papers which make up the file. These entries (in theory at least) would allow the career and final location of registered papers to be traced in detail, regardless of through which series they happened to pass. But even where these entries exist, their credentials need to be examined with some care, as the following example suggests. (See Chart III).

Here, a combination of an imperfectly applied system of recording 'previous' and 'subsequent' papers, together with a later re-arrangement of the papers concerned (both common enough afflictions) have rendered ineffective a safeguard which, on the surface, appears to be perfectly adequate. Papers before G 25/1955 at the very least,
whether discovered from the index cards or from references on other files, would now be impossible to find, since there is nothing on the texts themselves or in the register to connect them with their final location - file 0. 30/13.

This example taken from the local administration at Canberra is, in effect, no more than a microcosm of the way in which the machinery of government has functioned in general. What face the government archivist in Australia are the results of occurrences such as these, but translated into terms of the great departments of state and spread over anything from sixty to a hundred years. This is the kind of administrative setting in which the records of the registry have acquired their marginal notations, their coloured stampings, their identification symbols and all the other marks which record the receipt, transmission and issue of departmental papers.

The traditional lines of inquiry followed by the archivist are directed at the details of this setting, at the domestic history of each of the instrumentalities which flourished during a particular period. In this connection, the internal channels of communication, the existence and proliferation of special branches or sections, the route normally followed by documents in the conduct of certain classes of business, the nature of the machinery employed to assemble, control
and despatch papers, are all relevant considerations, essential alike in the identification of the records and their use. None of these considerations become any the less relevant when the object of interest is the records of a modern department, but when translated into modern terms, such inquiries represent an undertaking of considerable proportions, setting its own problems of elucidation, selection and presentation.

Yet this is not all. The domestic history of a department or office which created records under its own authority is and will remain the matter of immediate concern to archivists. But the circumstances of modern administrative organisation are such as to make it more and more unlikely that the answers for many inquiries will be found entirely within the limits of one department or one set of records. In the Commonwealth, for example, only the spheres of activity covered by the present departments of the Treasury, the Attorney-General and the Postmaster-General can be said to have remained anchored to the one instrumentality, and this to a purely relative degree. For the rest, social services, internal affairs, the government of territories, immigration, defence, public works, the story is one of frequent administrative reconstruction involving the appearance and disappearance of departments, offices, branches and the like, and accompanied by the transfer of functions and related records. Almost sixty departments have been created within as many years. To piece together the history of the organisation of any one department and of the records which it created, it is often necessary to investigate the operations not only of contemporary departments but of some which
precede and succeed the instrumentality in question. The very discovery of the extant records of a department may depend on the effects of half-a-dozen changes in the Administrative Arrangements, as well as those of any number of minor administrative re-adjustments.

The developments set out in this and the previous two chapters have increased the burdens of the archivist. If the passage of time has removed the hazards of language and script, it has also caused to disappear an administrative organisation in which a few great departments of state attended to a limited number of functions and in which changes, if measured in decades, are often scarcely perceptible. Now, both the structure of government and the structure of the records are so complicated and in a state of evolution so rapid and constant as to present virtually a new order of problems. How much can the archivist afford to set down about the organisation of a modern department; or more accurately, how much of the multitudinous detail can he afford to leave out? What is to be said of a particular record-keeping system, or of a succession of such systems where one mould has been removed and another imposed over the constantly growing body of records? How are the consequences of rapid evolution - the procession of departments, the migration of records from one system to another and from one administrative environment to another - how are these possibilities to be allowed for and made apparent? By
what vehicle are these discoveries and observations to be conveyed to the student public? Here are the new challenges within the traditional pursuits of the archivist.
PART III

THE ADMINISTRATION AND USE OF

THE ARCHIVES
1. PROBLEMS OF THE ARCHIVIST - ARRANGEMENT.

The now widely held notion that departmental archives should be arranged by reference to the instrumentality which created them and should be maintained in their original 'administrative' order is the product of developments which took place during the last century.¹ Until two circulars issued in 1839 and 1841 laid down certain instructions for the arrangement of archives lying in the French départements, it had been considered perfectly adequate to arrange official archives by reference to their subject-matter according to a pre-determined scheme of classification. The new circulars broke through this tradition by insisting that the records originating with "an administrative body, a corporation, or a family" were to be brought together as a 'fond'. Within each 'fond', however, records were still to be assembled by subject-matter and within each of the series thus created, were to be arranged chronologically, geographically or alphabetically. This principle of "respect pour les fonds", therefore, was no more than the first step towards the practice of reproducing in the repository the way in which records had been created by the machinery of government.

The line of development was concluded by a set of decrees compiled in the State Archives at Berlin and issued in July 1881. Exasperated by the inconveniences of a régime which continued to group records

¹ For an outline of these events, see T.R. Schellenberg, Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques (Melbourne, 1956) pp.168-179.
according to the pattern of government which had existed between 1807 and 1815, and aided by a domestic dispute, the archivists at Berlin devised a system of arrangement which was embodied in the Regulations of 1881. These not only insisted that the primary divisions of the archives were to be supplied by their administrative origin (i.e. a particular department or office) but, going further than their French counterparts, decreed that within each of these primary divisions, records were to be kept in the order and with the designations which they had received in the course of the official activity of the instrumentality concerned.

This thorough-going devotion to the preservation of the administrative connections of archives has passed into the tradition of archive-keeping largely through the medium of a Manual prepared in Holland at the end of the last century and subsequently translated into German (1905), Italian (1908) and French (1910).

But it has not gone unchallenged. In 1930 Carl Gustaf Weibull published his attack on the notion that the archivist must be concerned chiefly to restart or maintain the original order of the records.


The principal objective of the archivist, it seemed clear to him, was to be able to answer questions asked by official or private searchers as quickly as possible. To this end he was prepared to agree that the primary classification of the archives should be supplied by reference to their administrative origin, but within each of these divisions, Weibull insisted, the archives should be arranged by subject-matter, and not maintained in their administrative order. Such a proposal would seem to be, in essence, a return to the practice outlined for the administration of archives in the French départements nearly a century before.

While few archivists would dispute that the primary classification of material in the repository must be based on the administrative organs by which they had been created, there is as yet no unanimity as to how the records within each of these units should be organised. It seems fair to say that the majority of archivists still favour the retention or restoration of the original administrative order; however, a number remain who favour the imposition of varying degrees of 'artificial' or 'arbitrary' classification.

The British position in the matter is particularly interesting since here, if anywhere, the archivist in Australia is likely to find some illumination on the problems of arrangement which will be present in the records of both the colonial and Commonwealth periods. Sir Hilary Jenkinson, the chief spokesman and to some extent the formulator of British archive-keeping practices, accepts that "the only correct basis of Arrangement is exposition of the Administrative objects which
the Archives originally served; we need hardly stop therefore to say that such a basis cannot be found in the subject interests they may possess for modern students, in chronology, or even in the form in which they are cast." 5. As the unit of primary classification he adopts the Archive Group which, being defined as " the Archives resulting from the work of an Administration which was an organic whole, complete in itself, capable of dealing independently, without any added or external authority, with every side of any business which could normally be presented to it ", comes very close in spirit to the conception of the Fonds. Where he parts company from continental practices is in the identification of archive groups and the arrangement of their constituent series.

For the archivists of the Privy State Archives in 1881, anxious to modify a system of classification which forced records into an obsolete administrative mould, and supported by elaborate systems of record-keeping within the departments of the day, it was enough to insist that records be maintained in the order in which they were received from these departments. This achieved, by a simple stroke, the double purpose of modernizing the scheme by which records were classed in the repository and of providing the means by which records might be maintained in their administrative order within each of the primary divisions. But under English conditions, the classification of archives by reference to the department or office from which they were received is unacceptable as a general principle of arrangement, since the department in which

6. Ibid., p. 84.
they are found and the department by which they were created are not necessarily the same.

"Provenance," Sir Hilary wrote, "that word being taken to mean the place from which Archives come, may detain us a little longer; but the case of the Treasury of Receipt (the Class Exchequer T.R. at the Public Record Office) should suffice to show that it forms no true basis for arrangement. What Archives the Treasury of the Receipt contained in its four Treasuries (the contents of which were eventually deposited in the Chapter House from which they came to the Record Office) is indicated by Agarde's Compendium. They comprised specimens of almost every kind of public document, including large quantities of Legal Records and (it will be remembered) a considerable number of Receipt and Issue Rolls. Certain archives which it is difficult to ascribe with certainty to any particular court are still classed as Exchequer T.R., but the bulk have gone to rejoin other archives of the various courts to which they belong. Had they been classed according to the place from which they came the collection would have been almost as ridiculous and unmeaning as would the present Contents of the Public Record Office if, some centuries hence, the Patent Rolls of Chancery, the Plea Rolls of the Court of Common Pleas, the Pipe Rolls of the Exchequer, and the rest were all confounded together in one collection labelled Master of the Rolls Department.

The place, then, from which Archives are received should be a matter recorded by their Accession Numbers and the Accession Register; and may serve as a temporary class heading for the unidentified; but is not to be used normally to supply their primary division. That is provided by the Administration which produced them." 7.

As far as the arrangement of series within the Group is concerned, Jenkinson is forced to set aside the continental theory of arrangement. Muller, Feith and Fruin envisage a scheme in which all the original series form a skeleton - a ligne capitale (made up of the most important series administratively) to form the backbone with other series (lignes principales) to form the framework. All others must be regarded as subsidiary to these main series.

7. Ibid., pp. 80-1.
"We cannot, however, be satisfied that this, in the capacity of a model for Archive arrangement, will invariably give satisfaction. What of the case where no original series, or at any rate no Main Record, can be found in what is yet an important archive group? To carry on the metaphor from Palaeontology employed by its Authors, the Manual does not seem to provide for the case of the invertebrate. Let us examine for a moment the method of Archive-making employed, for example, in many modern Public Offices in England. Here the custom is at present to keep in a cover, known sometimes as a 'jacket', all papers relating to a particular case, a particular piece of business, or a series of small cases of the same kind. This jacket then includes original letters received, copies of letters dispatched, memoranda of the official who dealt with the business at each successive stage, and even minutes of superior authority or information derived from other departments of the same office. Impossible to split those up into series of letters, minutes, memoranda, &c., for the reference from one to another is generally by citation merely of their numerical order in the 'jacket'; equally impossible to distinguish between the work of superior and inferior officials at different stages of the transaction because both will use the same minute sheet." 8.

There is no possibility here of reconstructing the contents of a group or sub-group in a palaeontological fashion. Each series, however, must refer to at least one administrative function; otherwise they could never have been brought into existence. Might not this fact, Jenkinson asks, be used as the basis on which to class the series which make up a group or sub-group?

"If ... upon an examination of our Archive resources we decide which functions of the original Administration had Archive representation, we may proceed to utilize these Functions as headings under which to arrange our series (repeating a series under more than one heading where necessary); and may feel quite sure that the arrangement is based on the facts of archive history." 9.

8. Ibid., pp.89-90.
9. Ibid., p.94.
CHART IV
(1) Number Register of, and Index to, Papers Received, 1901
Correspondence, 1901

(2) Number (and Subject) Registers of Papers Received, 1901-2
Correspondence, 1901-1902

(3) Number (and Subject) Registers of Papers ('A') Received, 1902
Index to Papers ('A') Received, 1902
Correspondence ('A'), 1902

(4) Number Registers of Papers Received, 1903-1916
Index to Papers Received, 1903-1916
Card Index to Papers Received, 1911-1916

Correspondence, 1903-1916

(5) Number Registers of, and Indexes to, Papers ('P.H.') Received, 1904-8
Card Index to Papers ('P.H.') Received, 1911
Correspondence, 1904-1911
(5) Number registers of, and indices to, papers ('P.N.') received, 1904-1911
Card index to papers ('P.N.') received, 1911
Correspondence, 1904-1911

(6) Number register of papers ('N') received, 1910
Index to papers ('N') received, 1910
Correspondence ('N'), 1910

(7) Number registers of papers ('N.T.') received, 1912-1916
Card index to papers ('N.T.') received, 1912-1916
Correspondence ('N.T.'), 1912-1916

(8) Outward letter-books ('G-G'), 1903-1910
INDEX TO PAPERS (N) RECEIVED, 1910
CORRESPONDENCE (N'), 1910

(7) NUMBER REGISTERS OF PAPERS (N.T') RECEIVED, 1912-1916
CARD INDEX TO PAPERS (N.T') RECEIVED, 1912-1916
CORRESPONDENCE (N.T'), 1912-1916

(8) OUTWARD LETTER BOOKS (G-G), 1903-1910
OUTWARD LETTER BOOKS (S.P), 1903-1910
OUTWARD LETTER BOOK (IMM), 1909

(9) RECORD OF LICENCES ISSUED, ETC. PACIFIC ISLANDS LABOURERS ACT
REGISTER OF CONTRACT IMMIGRANTS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S OPINION BOOK
VOLUME OF PRECEDENTS, IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION ACT.
REGISTERS OF PENSIONS, ETC.

(10) NOTES AND PRECEDENT BOOK, PAPUA
RECORD OF LAND ISSUED TO MISSIONS IN PAPUA
MONTHLY RETURN OF LAND LEASES IN PAPUA
For the government archivist in Australia, then, only one thing seems certain – that archives will be classified primarily by Groups. On other matters, more contentious in their nature he, like archivists elsewhere, has a choice to make. Can Archives be classified in Groups according to the agencies from which they are received; or must he, too, reject provenance (strictly defined) as a suitable basis for arrangement? How are the records to be arranged within each Group; under arbitrary subject-headings, or in an order designed to illustrate their administrative connections? Perhaps we can best begin to answer these questions by recalling the nature and subsequent history of the body of records created by the first Commonwealth Department of External Affairs.

Example VI.

Between 1901 and 1916, the Department of External Affairs created a well defined pattern of registry records (see Chart IV).

Jan. 1901. First system of general correspondence established.

June 1901. Abolition of system (1). Correspondence divided between two new registers and papers kept according to a semi-classified method. Papers required for current business were taken up from (1) into (2) and (3).

Jan. 1903. Failure of the semi-classified system led to a return to more conventional methods. All departmental correspondence kept in one system. Active papers were taken up from (2) and (3).

May 1904. First Prime Minister to take portfolio other than External Affairs. The department remained the "Channel of communication" between the Commonwealth and the Imperial, State and foreign governments. Papers which had to be submitted to the Prime Minister were now separated from the main run of correspondence as a measure of convenience, and the new system (5) remained independent until it was transferred in 1911 to the newly established Prime Minister's Department. The system was based in the first instance on papers removed from (4).
Jan. 1910. Departmental correspondence divided between two registers. Papers relating to Immigration and Papua were placed in one register; all other papers were entered in the new 'A' system (6). The latter drew its early papers from (4).

Jan. 1911. Abolition of 'A' system; active papers were returned to (4).

Jan. 1912. Creation of a separate system (7) to cope with business resulting from the acquisition of the Northern Territory by the Commonwealth. All active papers relating to the Northern Territory were taken up from (4).

At any stage after the middle of 1901, the registry records of External Affairs could be divided into two categories. In the forefront would be the current system or systems whose records were constantly being expanded by the incorporation both of new material and of records drawn from any previous system. Behind this current arrangement of records would lie the remains of eight systems which had been superseded and which stood as little more than library material in relation to the current records. This was the position in June 1901, for example, when the new semi-classed systems (2) and (3) took over from (1). It was again the case in 1916 when the two current systems (4) and (7) were backed by the partially dismantled components of (1), (2), (3) and (6). Had the registry records of External Affairs been transferred to archive custody at this point, then their arrangement by reference to traditional methods would have seemed to present no difficulty. The relation of one system to another and of the contents of one series to those of another were perfectly clear. Even in the library series, the dormant papers were still accessible through the registers and indexes which had controlled them; the framework, if not the components, remained complete.
However between 1916 and 1960, the records created by the Department of External Affairs have been considerably affected by changes in the administrative arrangements of the Commonwealth. The degree to which alterations in the machinery of government have been allowed to react on the disposition of departmental records is a characteristic feature of Australian administrative procedure, both in the present century and in the last. There need be no automatic connection between a new organisation of government and the distribution of records created under the former set of arrangements. On the transfer of a function from Department A to Department B, there is no reason why the related records in one should not be closed off and new records opened in the other; for the latter purpose, records might easily be borrowed for consultation or copying. But Australian departments have, in general, adopted the alternative of transferring records along with functions, despite the hazards of fragmentation and loss which accompany such a course. Single items or whole series have been gathered up (often incompletely) and transferred to the custody of another department where they either have been built on or (if no longer in active use) retained as so much library material, available for consultation but for nothing else. During the last forty-four years, the records created by the registry of External Affairs have, in varying combinations, moved through the custody of no less than seven departments:

1. Number Register and Index .......... Prime Minister's.  
   Correspondence ........................ Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior; Immigration.

2. Number (and Subject) Registers .. Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Correspondence ........................ Home and Territories; Prime Minister's; Home Affairs; Interior; Immigration.
3. Number (and Subject Register ('A')).
   Index ('A') ........................................
   Correspondence ('A') ............................

   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior;
   Territories.

4. Number Registers ..............................
   Indexes ...........................................
   Card Index ......................................
   Correspondence .................................

   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Home and Territories; Prime Minister's; Home Affairs;
   Interior; Immigration; Territories.
   Home and Territories; Prime Minister's; Home Affairs;
   Interior; Immigration; Territories; External Affairs.

5. Number Registers and Indexes ('P.M.').
   Card Index ('P.M.') .............................
   Correspondence ('P.M.') ........................

   Prime Minister's.
   Prime Minister's.
   Prime Minister's.

6. Number Register ('A') ........................
   Index ('A') ......................................
   Correspondence ('A') ............................

   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior;
   Territories.

7. Number Registers ('N.T.') ....................
   Card Index ('N.T.') .............................
   Correspondence ('N.T.') ........................

   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior;
   Territories.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior;
   Territories.
   Home and Territories; Home Affairs; Interior;
   Territories.

In this process of movement and subdivision, the series of correspondence have suffered more severely than the records of control - a fact which is due almost entirely to the intractable nature of the latter when in volume form. Where indexes are maintained by one card system
or another, these are as open to pillage and disturbance ( e.g. the card index in item 4 ) as any of the correspondence series which they control.

The degree of fragmentation varies considerably from one group of registry records to another. In the first, dispersal is complete; register and correspondence were separated after 1916 and the latter divided among a growing number of departments between then and the present day. The fourth group of records presents a slightly different case. Here, registers, one series of indexes, and a portion of the correspondence have remained together; the rest ( and in particular, the correspondence ) has been widely distributed. The seventh group, the Northern Territory ( 'N.T.' ) records, has not been broken up since the system was begun in 1912, passing from External Affairs to Home and Territories first as a working registry system and then ( since Northern Territory business returned to the principal registry in 1925 ) as a collection of dormant records, in which form it reached the present Department of Territories. But even this situation is not as satisfactory as it might seem. For one thing, files relating to business under consideration were removed from their original position in the 'N.T.' records and incorporated in later systems. For another, records relating to the Northern Territory were not kept separately until 1912; before then, such business was conducted from the main series of correspondence ( see Chart IV ) from which the 'N.T.' records grew and in which the earlier ones at least still have their roots. Although the group of 'N.T.' records has remained relatively intact, it is no longer associated with the parent series.
CHART V
(1) NUMBER REGISTER OF, AND INDEX TO, PAPERS RECEIVED, 1901
   CORRESPONDENCE, 1901

(2) NUMBER (AND SUBJECT) REGISTERS OF PAPERS RECEIVED, 1901-2
   CORRESPONDENCE, 1901-1902

(3) NUMBER (AND SUBJECT) REGISTERS OF PAPERS ('A') RECEIVED, 1902
   INDEX TO PAPERS ('A') RECEIVED, 1902
   CORRESPONDENCE ('A') 1902

(4) NUMBER REGISTERS OF PAPERS RECEIVED, 1903-1916
   INDEX TO PAPERS RECEIVED, 1903-1910
   CARD INDEX TO PAPERS RECEIVED, 1911-1916
   CORRESPONDENCE, 1903-1916

(5) NUMBER REGISTERS OF, AND INDEX TO, PAPERS ('P.H.') RECEIVED, 1904-11
   CARD INDEX TO PAPERS ('P.H.') RECEIVED, 1911
   CORRESPONDENCE, 1904-1911
(5) Card Index to Papers (P.M.) Received, 1894-11
   Correspondence, 1894-1911

(6) Number Register of Papers (A') Received, 1910
   Index to Papers (A') Received, 1910
   Correspondence (A'), 1910

(7) Number Registers of Papers (N.T) Received, 1912-1916
   Card Index to Papers (N.T) Received, 1912-1916
   Correspondence (N.T), 1912-1916

(R) Outward Letter-Boxes (G.G.), 1905-1910
(1) Number registers of papers (n.t.) received, 1912-1916
Card index to papers (n.t.) received, 1912-1916
Correspondence (n.t.), 1912-1916

(2) Outward letter-books (G.G.), 1905-1910
Outward letter-books (L.R.), 1905-1910
Outward letter-book (Imm.) 1909

(3) Record of licenses issued, etc., Pacific Islands Labourers Act
Register of contract immigrants
Attorney-General's opinion book
Volume of precedents, Immigration Restriction Act
Registers of pensions, etc.

(5) Notes and precedent book, Papua
Record of land issued to missions in Papua
Monthly return of land leased in Papua

Department of the Interior
Prime Ministers Department
Department of Territories
Department of Immigration
Department of External Affairs
Of the seven departments through which these records have passed, five (Interior, Immigration, External Affairs, Prime Minister's, Territories) remain in existence at the present time and from them, the records of the first Department of External Affairs have found their way into archival custody (see Chart V).

When records transferred by these departments are received in the repository, how are they to be classified? Accepted practice insists that in any scheme for the final classification of material in the repository records should be attributed to the department which produced them. To pursue any other course would be to deny the characteristic of evolution to a body of material which is itself the product of a constantly evolving set of machinery. Can we regard the records transferred by Interior as having been created by that department? Most importantly, can the old records of External Affairs which are now found among those of Interior be regarded as forming part of the records of the latter department?

Some quite clearly can. An item which has originated in Department A and then, by the making of additional entries or the addition of further papers or by some such formal act as re-registration, incorporated into the records of B, must now be regarded as forming part of the records of the latter department, despite its origin in A. In this way, for example, an item which originated in one registry series of External Affairs and is now found to be incorporated in the registry series of the same or another department must remain where it is; the alternative would be to force it into what is for it an
obsolete administrative context. But not all the External Affairs records can be regarded as being firmly anchored in Interior.

The first registry system established by the Department of External Affairs in 1901 consisted of a series of correspondence files controlled by a register and index, both of which were combined in one volume. Relics of this system are now to be found in at least three different places. One collection of files is lying at present among the records transferred by the Department of the Interior; another is with the records attributed to Immigration; a third is part of the records transferred by the second Department of External Affairs. The register, on the other hand, came to the repository from the Prime Minister's Department.

When the system was abolished in 1901, certain files were taken up into the succeeding system; the remainder, together with the register/index, became library material of the Department of External Affairs. On the abolition of that department in 1916 this material, together with the records incorporated in the then current system, were divided between the administrative successors to External Affairs. The bulk of the library material was transferred to the new Department of Home and Territories, from which it passed in 1928 to the Department of Home Affairs, which in turn transferred it to the newly established Department of the Interior in 1932. When functions were transferred from one of these three departments between 1917 and 1950, portions of this library material, together with active records, had been handed over to the department concerned. Thus, we now find fragments of
this old series of External Affairs in Immigration and the second Department of External Affairs, as well as in Interior. The presence of the register in the Prime Minister's Department may be explained by nothing more impressive than the fact that on the spine of the volume appears the legend "Prime Minister ", being an abbreviation for "Department of the Prime Minister ", a name by which the Department of External Affairs was known in the early months of 1901.

As they stand, these fragments are quite foreign to the records whose company they now keep. Apart from the fact that the former series of correspondence has been subdivided from time to time, the records remain just as they were left by External Affairs in June 1901, with no additions or other alterations. Nor in their progress through five departments did the apparatus currently operated by any registry take notice of their existence. The significance of their present position in Interior depends entirely on the possibility that they may have been consulted by succeeding departments in the course of business. But in the absence of any record of movement and without any notations on the files themselves, the extent to which they were consulted and thus entered into the life of the department in whose possession they were, is entirely a matter for speculation and as such cannot be a matter of any great concern to the archivist.

Series like that of general correspondence which functioned between 1903 and 1916 may present a different order of problem. If we are prepared to accept that the abolition of a department or office terminates automatically all the series being operated at the time, then,
of course, no problem exists; items from such a series are as much
library material as those from any other in the same department until
they are incorporated in another set of records. But can we consider
that a series must terminate with the abolition of the department by
which it was being operated? The answer must depend on the means
by which we identify our series, and this will differ according to
circumstances. The basis on which an archivist classifies a single
item as a series or brings together several items to form a series may
be a common format, a common mode of arrangement, common subject-matter,
a common source or varying combinations of all four. To identify
registry series, the only universally applicable means of reference is
their connection with a particular system of arrangement and control;
the series of General Correspondence (1903–1916), whose subject-
matter is diverse and which constantly varied from one year to another,
whose material is drawn from innumerable sources and whose contents
display every vagary of shape and appearance, would make nonsense of
any other yardstick. If this is the case, then it seems possible
that we shall encounter series which have moved through two, three or
even four departments, while still in active use.

When the Department of External Affairs was abolished in 1916, for
example, the current registry apparatus (a series of general corres-
pondence files, a series of register volumes, a series of index volumes
and a card index) was transferred to the new Department of Home and
Territories. There, new files were opened and added to the existing
series (without, incidentally, any break in the identification numbers),
other files from the External Affairs period were brought up and added
to by the registry of **Home and Territories**; fresh cards were added to
the index, and further volumes appeared in the series of registers.
This process continued until 1928, when **Home and Territories** was replaced
by **Home Affairs**, which in turn continued the several series and continued
to bring up material from the older parts of the series (i.e. records
created by **External Affairs** and **Home and Territories**) into the more
recent and more active parts. In 1932, the procedure was renewed
yet again, when **Interior** succeeded **Home Affairs**.

Circumstances like these are not limited to records created by **External Affairs**. By a process similar to that outlined on pages 178
and 179 above, the material transferred by **Interior** has come to include
library material from both departments of **Home Affairs**, the departments
of **Home and Territories**, and **Works and Railways**, and the **Federal
Capital Commission**. Moreover, to add to an already complicated
situation, what is true of the material transferred by **Interior** is true
also of the records received from many other departments. In fact
there are few present-day departments whose records do not include some
material which can more properly be regarded as the creation of another
instrumentality. By some means, material of this sort has to be
drawn together in such a way as to illustrate its true administrative
allegiance. This is the first problem of arrangement which faces the
archivist.

Everything depends on the purpose of the scheme of arrangement or
classification which the archivist adopts for the contents of his
repository. He has a choice in the matter. If the scheme is to
reflect the departments by which records were created (as opposed to transferred), then the records of External Affairs, the Federal Capital Commission and the rest, which are now found as library material among the records of Interior, must be recovered from their present situation and, together with similar fragments from other transferred records, be brought together to form groups of records in their own right. In the case of External Affairs, records created by that department would be retrieved from the records transferred by Interior, Territories, the present Department of External Affairs, Immigration and Prime Minister's, and restored to the pattern on which they were maintained before the department was abolished in 1916. This method, repeated for the records of the Federal Capital Commission, Home Affairs and the numerous other departments, boards, commissions and the like which have functioned in the Commonwealth between 1901 and the present day, is the accepted way of proceeding to arrange the contents of a repository by reference to the administrative origins of the archives; but it is not the only course open to the archivist.

A more unconventional approach would be to regard the scheme of arrangement as nothing more than a means of achieving a fixed location and, as a result, of allotting a control mark to each item. This, in itself, is a perfectly practicable device and would allow the records to be grouped by reference to the department which transferred them. In this way the records could be shelved and numbered, without waiting on the gathering together of fragments from the records of a number of other departments. There can be no doubt that such a procedure is the simplest and speediest way of providing a system of groups and series for the purposes of control.
Since under both methods it is possible eventually to exhibit the records created by the Department of External Affairs between 1901 and 1916 (see Chart IV), the factor which determines the choice of one in preference to the other is entirely one of convenience. Is it more convenient, for example, to work in two stages: first identifying and arranging the records in terms of the agency which transferred them, and then classifying them perhaps by means of descriptive aids, according to the agency which created them? Or is it preferable to proceed directly from accessioning material to arranging it by reference to the department which created it?

Where the records of more recently established governments are concerned, there can be no doubt that the practice of arranging records by reference to the departments which transferred them to the repository has its apparent attractions, provided that the archivist is reconciled to the growth of two categories of these groups. One will represent the departments of the day, from which records are still being received; the other, whose number will increase with the years, will stem from departments which formerly transferred records but which are now defunct. The latter type of group and the earliest records of the former are both made up of material which is suitable for arranging, shelving and numbering in what may be regarded as its final form. But such a practice achieves no more under Australian conditions than lead inevitably to the congregation of records which possess no common administrative allegiance, and if no further steps are taken, accepts as permanent the divorce of registers, indexes and papers which have no other connection beyond the one between themselves. The archivist is left still confronted by the very problems which the canons of archive administration
have been framed to counter.

To solve them, in this case, the archivist is obliged to proceed to a second stage in the preparation of his archives, and classify them by an additional system of inventories, according to the departments by which they were created. But it must be remembered that although during this second stage it is perfectly possible (on paper) to classify records by the departments which created them, the inventories by which this will chiefly be done must exercise a remoter form of control over the material than is traditional in such instruments. An inventory, as a rule, fulfils the double purpose of providing a finding-aid to the whereabouts of the records in the repository and (because these are arranged by reference to the department which created them) an exposition of their administrative connections. Where the archivist has abandoned the traditional form of arrangement and has assembled Groups according to the departments which transfer records, we cannot expect to find the records created by External Affairs identified as such, but as part of the records attributed to Interior, Territories, or any of the other departments from which they have been received. To re-classify such material in order to reflect the department which created it must often entail the use of clumsy devices. The series of General Correspondence which functioned between 1903 and 1916, for example, can never be identified simply as a series of External Affairs records, but must appear as an amalgamation of records drawn from Interior, Immigration, the present Department of External Affairs, Prime Minister's and Territories. In any descriptive aid, one this/series would have to be labelled by five different identification
symbols; in any inventory of its contents, the items could not be listed by their archive numbers since these again would belong to five different sequences. How far such a state of affairs would be an impediment to the archivist in the administration of his archives and a source of confusion to the student public, are matters which can be settled only in the light of experience. On the face of things, however, there seem to be some grounds to question the value of embarking on such an elaborate undertaking when a widely accepted alternative exists.

The alternative, of course, is to arrange records by reference to the creating department. If this is done, then the preparation of the records comprises only one stage, since there is no need to re-classify by some independent means the order in which records are arranged in the repository. But a price has to be paid. Before material is classed according to the department by which it was created, some note might well have to be made of the department from which it was received, since departments are often considered to enjoy certain rights over the material which they transfer, more particularly the ability to recall records from the repository for use in the department. But this is purely an administrative problem and not one which relates to the methods of arrangement and description practised by an archive institution. Again, the formation of Groups on this principle might well be a lengthy operation. To arrange records by reference to the transferring department, it is necessary only to ensure that the basements of one department have been emptied. To arrange records on the basis of the creating department, on the other hand, it may be necessary,
at least so far as the records of the Commonwealth are concerned, to wait until the record-rooms of a number of departments have been cleared. Until, for example, all the older records of Interior, Prime Minister's, the present Department of External Affairs, Immigration and Territories have been transferred, it would be premature to arrange and bring fully under control the records created by External Affairs between 1901 and 1916; an unexpected accession of material could easily upset a carefully devised scheme of classification and numeration. The solution lies in the degree of control which is imposed on records at the time of accessioning. If this is enough simply to identify each item, then there is no reason why, on the re-arrangement of the records, this control should not be adapted similarly to carry them through until the Group is considered to be complete.

With the records created by External Affairs now drawn together, how are they to be arranged? To follow out one line of approach, it would be necessary to dismantle the seven registry systems in varying degrees, either re-arranging all the papers and files according to a pre-determined scheme of subject-classification,9 or (leaving

9. As suggested by Weibull; see above, p. 242: 172.
the framework of series intact) classifying the files within each
series by reference to their subject-matter. Would either of
these methods be acceptable?

The circumstances which have produced the more modern registry
practices suggest that this might not be the case. Each paper,
in a series of papers received or issued, is from one point of view
independent of its neighbours. It was written at a different time
and was received at a different time; its distinctiveness is emphasised
by the fact of its being registered (and therefore identified) separately.
There is not necessarily any significance in the fact
that paper no.42 is preceded by no.41 and succeeded by no.43, though
there is much if we are concerned to preserve the 'natural' quality
of the accumulation of papers. From another point of view, however,
each paper may possess (or come to possess) some degree of affinity
— common source, common subject-matter — with one or more of the other
papers in the same series and perhaps even with papers in other series.
So often was this the case indeed, that the practice arose whereby
related papers were joined together, regardless of into which series
they had first been registered. By these means one set of relation-
ships was illustrated and the indexing of papers by name and subject
was used to illustrate many more. Now, in some registries, papers
are being placed directly on to files without being first registered as
as part of either a series of papers received or issued. Just as in

10. As considered by the meeting of Australian archivists in Canberra,
1954. Proceedings of the Archives Management Seminar (Canberra,
1955) p.31.
former times the registers were used to record the sequence of papers added to a particular series and the indexes provided a key to the contents of each, so now the registers record the sequence in which files have been added to a particular series and indexes attempt to indicate the subject-matter of each. Each of these files within a series enjoys a higher degree of independence and individuality in relation to its neighbours than do the individual papers in a series of papers received. But these small groups of papers - the files - are themselves marshalled in pre-determined ways into one or other series. The department or office does this for a practical reason. Unless each file is encyclopaedic (which is unlikely) each possesses, or may come to possess, varying degrees of affinity with other files in the same series. These affinities need to be demonstrated; but this depends (as in the case of individual papers) on the identity and position of each item being recorded and maintained. This, the department or office does. It arranges individual papers by subject by placing them on files; it arranges the files by subject either by ranging related files together (as in an earlier stage related papers had been brought together) or by means of an index, or both. In other words, departmental papers are now being assembled and controlled on two levels, and our series of correspondence are growing in two ways at once - horizontally (as the number of files is extended) and vertically (as the number of papers on each increases). Can we now with profit partially dismantle this structure? Have these series of files any permanent standing or value; or can they be dispensed with without impeding our approach to the records or obscuring the factors which have shaped a particular accumulation of records?
To answer these questions, it is necessary first to put another: is it ever desirable to consider the files of papers in relation to other series of registry records? If the intention is to supplement or even replace the records of control - registers, indexes, blank-cover books - by 'artificial' finding aids and descriptive devices (as is well within the province of an archive institution) then the answer must be at least a qualified negative, depending on the scale of assistance to be provided. In theory at least it is possible to take an accumulation of correspondence and so arrange and describe it as to make the production of individual items quite certain. If this were done, then the older records of control associated with the correspondence appear to become superfluous. But is the production of a particular paper or file as much as is ever required? The systems practised by registries have already been likened to a mechanism - to a system of mutually adapted parts working together. In its mode of operation, each system (it has been suggested) is likely to differ from another, and some may differ extremely; it follows from this that the body of records which each creates will differ from the creations of others in similar proportions. Indeed, one recent writer on the subject has remarked: "With respect to modern records, then, a study of the methods and techniques of the file room is the modern counterpart of the study of diplomatics with respect to mediaeval records. It is a study that is vital to the maintenance of high quality in archival material and archival workmanship."\(^\text{11}\) If, in connection with any investigation, we wish to examine the way in which

\(^{11}\) T.R. Schellenberg, \textit{op.cit.}, p.27.
evidence has been assembled, a decision taken or a piece of business transacted; if, in short, we are obliged to follow the department at work, then it may be impossible to do so unless the series of files can be examined in relation to the other registry series which governed their creation and control. Here, as likely as not, will be found at least one clue to why the literary evidence takes the form it does.

If all the series - those of papers and files of correspondence as well as those of registers, indexes and other records of control - are to be kept intact, the problem of how they are to be arranged within the Group then arises. If we look for a superior form of series we shall be disappointed; there is nothing but abundance of series of correspondence, of registers and indexes, none of which can be regarded as in any way having precedence over the other except in point of time. We find, to follow Jenkinson, yet another example of the 'primitive' method of archive-making which leads, from the administrative point of view, to an invertebrate accumulation of records. Papers received and issued, minutes and memoranda, are all found filed together. Matters of routine administration and cabinet decisions follow one another in the same sequence of papers. There can be no question of separating these papers into series of letters, minutes, memoranda etc., not because, as Jenkinson observes, "the reference from one to another is generally by citation merely of their numerical order in the jacket "; but because although at this time papers were still being registered individually as part of one series or another, only 'important' papers were so treated. Therefore some items in a file of papers do not carry control marks of any
description. Without major and minor series in the scale of administrative importance, there can be no question of ordering the series in such a way as to demonstrate the processes of administration.

Nor does it seem possible to apply generally the method of utilising administrative functions as headings under which to arrange the series. It is true that in some respects, the 'A' and the 'N.T.' series (see Chart IV) may be regarded as standing apart from their fellows in that they deal with a less general range of subject-matter. Also, the series of 'P.M.' records (made up of material to be submitted to the Prime Minister) might be regarded as forming a distinct category of records. But to class the remaining records it would be necessary to divide (on paper) the successive series of general correspondence by reference to the functions of the department, ranging, as they did, from the administration of Papua to the preparation of the Commonwealth Gazette. The process would demonstrate accurately neither the contents of the series nor the administrative organisation of which they were the product, and in no way resembles the process of classing the Records of Issue in the Exchequer of Receipt outlined by Jenkinson in his Manual. 12.

The way in which the registry records of External Affairs have evolved itself provides the clue to a scheme for their arrangement. Between 1901 and 1916, seven distinct systems were employed in succession. Each was a complete piece of machinery in its own right and was constructed

to an individual pattern. But each is also in a direct line of
descent from the system originally installed in January 1901, and each
was not only founded on material drawn from its predecessors but also
continued throughout its active life to appropriate records from the
same source. Records of this type enjoy a cohesion and a demonstrable
history not shared by records more informally assembled and controlled;
here, if anywhere, the archivist is on firm ground in devising a scheme
of arrangement. For more informally kept records, on the other hand,
the identification of series and the ordering of their contents are
often matters more of individual taste than restoration.

In dealing with the arrangement of departmental correspondence,
then, the primary distinction seems to be one between records whose
growth has followed a discernible pattern and those which have not.
A classification of this sort would provide the Group with a solid core,
within which the series can be arranged according to a well-defined
scheme. This, it seems fairly obvious, would first require the
parts of each system, the related series of papers, registers, indexes
and the like, to be brought together. Then systems might be shelved
in some way as to follow, as far as possible, their relation to each
other; the seven systems operated by External Affairs could usefully
be arranged in the order of their creation, since all descend directly
from the system originally installed in January 1901. As far as the
series of non-registry records of the External Affairs Group are
concerned, the order in which they are shelved is not a matter of great
importance, though here, as with the registry records, it would
obviously be more convenient to have mutually dependent series close to
one another. But for the purpose of finding records in the repository the arrangement of the series need not be influenced by, or attempt to follow, the organisation of the department which created them; indeed, given the existence of a central registry whose series do not correspond to the divisions of the department, it would be impossible even to attempt such a course of action. If we parcelled out the systems and the individual series by reference to the divisions of the department of External Affairs – Central Office, Northern Territory Branch, Prime Minister's Office – in which section would we place the series of Outward Letter Books which were used in conjunction with systems in the Central Office and the Prime Minister's Office? As far as the repository is concerned, what is important about system (4) as opposed to system (5) of External Affairs registry (see Chart IV) is not that one contains Central Office records and the other those of the Prime Minister's Office, but that one grew out of the other, that they ran concurrently, that they were maintained by the same registry, and that they are to some extent inter-dependent. To demonstrate the administrative connections of the External Affairs Group of records, to relate them to the way in which the department was organised and the divisions of the office by which they were used, are not matters which can properly be brought within the sphere of physical arrangement. For these purposes the more subtle and flexible medium of the descriptive aid is required.
2. **PROBLEMS OF THE ARCHIVIST — DESCRIPTION.**

Descriptive aids as prepared by the archivist may set out to do one of two things. Either they may offer a guide (in varying degrees of detail) to the structure of the archives as these are arranged in the repository, or they may refer to a selection of these archives, chosen from various series and Groups, but all relating to a particular theme or sphere of interest. Such, for example, are the Reference Information Papers prepared by the National Archives in Washington and dealing with such matters as forest products or "Materials in the National Archives relating to the Historical Programs of Civilian Government Agencies During World War II." 1. Descriptive aids of this sort, of course, provide little more than footnotes to the existing structure of the archives, and until the latter has been fully described, must remain something of a luxury for the archivist. Moreover, they suffer from all the difficulties inherent in choosing 'interesting' or 'important' subjects and 'relevant' documents; rarely are they able to provide a secure basis for the work of the historian. The pages which follow are not concerned with this aspect of archive administration, but with the issues involved in bringing under control the archives as they lie in the repository.

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In this regard the government archivist in Australia has been exposed to the influence of a number of established practices from overseas, notably from the United States and the United Kingdom. There, both the level of description and the instruments employed vary from one institution to another. For the National Archives in Washington, three forms of descriptive aid generally suffice. Of these, the first to be applied and the most rudimentary in nature are the Group Registration Statements, which give "the main facts about the origin, organisation and functions of the agencies whose records constitute the respective groups, brief descriptions of the records belonging to the group in the custody of the Archivist, references to the accessioning transactions by which the records were brought in, the names of the branches within the National Archives that have immediate charge of the records, and brief statements about the location of other records not in the custody of the Archivist that would appropriately belong to the record groups." 2. The principal descriptive aid is the Preliminary Inventory, a medium which not only supplies a history of the institution by which the archives in question have been created, together with a list of the series, but also appends to each title in this list a brief description of the subject-matter and salient characteristics of the archives involved:

CORRESPONDENCE OF EDWARD ROWAN, 1934-43. 10 in. 123.

Letters received from and copies of letters sent to State supervisors, artists, Government agencies, various organisations and individuals concerning the activities of the Section, individual art projects being carried on in the regions, and related matters. Arranged by subjects, thereunder chronologically.


Beyond the fact that information from these two aids is taken to compile a Guide to Records in the National Archives, little further work is undertaken in connection with each Group. "While it is the declared policy of the National Archives that all its holdings shall be covered (1) by registration statements, providing current general information on record groups created by large governmental entities, and (2) by inventories naming and describing in general terms every unit of records at the series level, the preparation of detailed lists of separate items below the series level is not prescribed as a routine step. Their preparation is time consuming and they should be undertaken only when there is a well-defined need for the information they contain." 4 Lists, when they are prepared, take a variety of forms. Some are nothing more than a recital of the primary classifications of the scheme under which the items were assembled originally by the office or department; others may deal with the individual items of series either selectively or comprehensively, often grouping the entries by subject. 5

It is chiefly in this matter of attending to individual items that the difference lies between American practices as represented by the National Archives and British practices as demonstrated by the Public Record Office. In the latter case, less attention is paid to the series or Classes as such and rather more to the individual archives.

5. Ibid., p.11.
of which they are composed. In the Guide, each Group of archives is dealt with separately. Each entry contains information on the origin of the Group and on the history of the office which produced it. These are followed by a description for each Class, giving the terminal dates, the number of pieces and their subject-matter. This structure is reflected in greater detail in the series of Lists. Here, each piece (e.g. a bundle, a volume, a folder) in a Class of archives is mentioned separately; its identification mark, the period which it covers and a summary of its contents appearing in that order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C.O. 167</td>
<td></td>
<td>Original Correspondence - Secretary of State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>Slave Trade papers, Bourbon, enclosure to Col. Keating's letter of 16 March.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Slave Trade Papers, Bourbon, transmitted by Mr. St. Croix.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below the Lists come the Calendars (to be used for older material) and the Descriptive Lists (to be applied to more extensive series) by which are set out in varying degrees of detail the subject-matter of the items which make up the principal series in any Class.


A conference of archivists held in Canberra in 1954 examined the merits of describing archives by series as a whole and by individual items, taking the Preliminary Inventory and the Descriptive List as examples of each method. At the end of a short discussion it was concluded that

"The inventory should be based on the record group and should use the series as the unit of description. The descriptive list may be produced at any stage.

The descriptive list is primarily designed to assist research workers but should not be produced except when specifically required."

Practical expression was given to this decision by the undertaking of a Guide to Pre-Federation Archives, of which the principal vehicle was to be the Preliminary Inventory. To encourage some degree of uniformity in this direction, General instructions for the preparation of a guide to Australian public archives of the pre-federation period were prepared, dealing with not only the compilation of the Introduction, but also the grouping, titling and description of series. Between 1954 and the present, attention and slender resources have been diverted towards work of this kind. All States (except Queensland) have produced sample entries and the Commonwealth (for its own purposes) has also prepared a number of inventories on the American model. If descriptive practices can be said to be following any direction at all in Australia, they are moving along the lines set by the Preliminary Inventory, and archivists generally are committed to the preparation

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9. These instructions were based on those set out in the Staff Information Circulars, No.14 (National Archives, Washington, 1950).
of a single instrument which supplies a history of the department or office concerned, a list of the series, and a descriptive entry for each.

As a method, the Preliminary Inventory has something in its favour. It can be produced with some speed, it is economical of space, and it provides a readily used conspectus of a given body of archives. Yet, in the last analysis, it remains nothing but a list of series titles, each elaborated in some degree by an entry describing the subject-matter of the series in question. This procedure has obvious shortcomings. A well framed title, backed up by a succinct descriptive passage, can do much to define the character and scope of the archives which make up some series:

REGIONAL SUMMARIES OF REPORTS ON CURRENT AND RECENT LAND OCCUPANCY AND SETTLEMENT. 1937. 1 in. 172.

Summarize objectives, lands designated, the type of settlement unit proposed, and people to be affected. These reports summarize some of the reports described in entry 171. Arranged by Resettlement Administration region number.

But neither the title nor the descriptive entry by which it is supported can provide adequately for the series whose contents are miscellaneous in character. Correspondence often falls within this category. Such series, of course, may vary considerably in their degree of generality. The series of correspondence concerning the administration of the Northern Territory maintained by the Department of External Affairs (see Chart IV) is more closely defined and easier to describe than, say, the series of correspondence relating to matters to be brought

before the Prime Minister or, to go further, the series regarded simply as "General Correspondence". How, for example, is the content of the latter to be indicated? By implication, it relates to all the functions of the department not catered for specifically by other series. Is it then sufficient for the descriptive entry to refer to or even list these remaining functions of the department? Clearly not, since the briefest examination of the registry indexes suggests the existence of archives connected with the pursuit of a much wider range of activities. Do we then list functions and index headings? Again, clearly not, since such an entry in a Preliminary Inventory would be objectionable not only on account of its length but also on the grounds that it must still overlook archives which, though intrinsically interesting, were not numerous enough to form a distinct class by subject-matter within the index. In such cases (and they are numerous enough since most offices or departments maintain at least one series of 'General' correspondence) an inventory has to be prepared not only of the series created by a particular instrumentality, but also of the items which comprise some or all of those series. It is a case not so much of taking this extra step in order to assist research workers (as the 1954 Canberra conference had regarded such listing) as of making good an inherent deficiency in the principal form of descriptive aid, an aid which is prepared for the benefit of the archivist as well as the student public.

But is such a List the only regular form of adjustment which the Preliminary Inventory (in its imported form) seems to require? In great measure, the answer turns on the extent to which a knowledge of the circumstances which have moulded a body of archives - the methods
of their control, the organisation of the department which they served and the effects of changes in the structure of government as a whole - can be conceived as being as important for their use as a familiarity with their subject-matter.

There exists a class of inquiries for which these considerations have little or no relevance. The date of an appointment, the existence of an official, any query which can be met by the contents of a single paper or perhaps a single file of papers; for such investigations as these anything more than the production of the individual texts may well be superfluous.

But let the inquirer examine the reasons for an appointment, the operations of an official, the conduct of one or many aspects of governmental activity - then the answer is less likely to be found in one paper or in one file of papers, and may even involve the records of more than one Group. An inquiry which puts the archives to work, so to speak, cannot afford to overlook the ways in which evidence has been assembled and transmitted. As far as files of papers are concerned, it is safer to regard each as not necessarily an independent entity, but as one whose papers may relate to (and may in fact have been used in connection with) others differently classified in the same or other series of files, and one whose composition may be explicable only by reference to the other parts - registers and indexes - of a registry system. For this purpose the systems and conventions of a registry are as worthy of illustration as the subject-matter and volume of the records which it has created.
Nor can any extensive use of departmental records long ignore the various patterns on which executive government has been organised. Business transacted between departments is conducted inevitably in terms of the administrative arrangements of the day. Departments which no longer exist once communicated with one another; registries long since defunct once received and issued the papers. But not only is it necessary to be able to examine archives in the administrative setting in which they originally functioned, it has also to be remembered that papers and files active in one period may be re-deployed at a later date, not only leaving gaps among their original contemporaries in a series, but moving into an entirely new administrative environment themselves. Given the extent to which the framework of modern government is elaborated and reconstructed, it must become increasingly necessary to look beyond the boundaries of one Group, not merely to ascertain the arrangements which existed for the conduct of a particular class of business at any given time, but also to trace the movement of files and other items between one series and another, and between one Group and another. The administrative pedigree of series and the regular and irregular passage of items between them - these are the matters which now have to be recorded with a thoroughness and consistency which do not always characterise the original instruments of control prepared by the departments.

"Why has this file taken its present form?" "Where is such and such a paper from the old Department of External Affairs?" "From which series was this class of business conducted subsequently?" These and their like are questions which can all arise in the course of
using departmental archives in Australia. Whether they refer to the archives within one Group or relate to archives contained in several, they cannot always be answered by reference to a narrative history of the department or departments concerned, and rarely by application simply to the lists of series or items as they stand. These are questions which all touch on the more technical aspects of archive making and of archive history, and as such require a special provision on the part of the archivist.

Quite clearly it is impossible to suggest that simply by extending the descriptive entries in the Preliminary Inventories all these new categories of information could be provided for. It is true that such an extension could, to some extent, supply details of registry systems, methods of classification and the like; this has been done both in the American model and (more extensively) in the Australian copy. Nor would it be impossible to devise some means of indicating in the same entries, the administrative connections of one series with another. But recording the whereabouts of items which have moved from their original location presents quite another problem. Information of this sort could never be incorporated in the Preliminary Inventory, since the latter essentially deals with series as a whole rather than with their components. Nor would it be practicable to modify the Descriptive Lists whose main function, after all, is to indicate the subject-matter of items which make up the series of archives as they stand at present, not as they have been at various times in the past. There seems to be no prospect, then, that either of the two principal forms of descriptive aid can cater, individually or together, for the
varieties of description which modern departmental archives require. How can this information be presented economically and usefully? Perhaps the most useful starting place is to distinguish between the purposes for which this information is acquired and presented.

On the one hand the intention is to display, as intimately as possible, the range of subject-matter covered by the archives at present in the repository. Information of this sort is of concern to all sections of the student public who may consult the archives, but it is necessary at this point to distinguish further between aids prepared for use in the Reading Room and those intended for circulation. A number of factors demand that the latter should be moderate in scope and simple in use; production cannot afford to be too costly in time and labour, while elaborate information is only a possible source of error and confusion to the inexpert user. The need for some form of Guide is too obvious to require demonstration, but the purposes of such an instrument are, after all, nothing more than to supply a repertory of the contents of an Archive and to indicate where a search might usefully begin. The narrative histories of departments and the miscellaneous information concerning administrative circumstances which have shaped the character of the archives at present appearing in many Guides and other circulated material, have great value in themselves, but are only of direct application when the student has arrived in the Reading Room and has the archives before him. Moreover, given the increasingly complicated nature of the machinery of government and the multitudinous detail concerning the working of departments which directly relate to the archives, the practicability of such a procedure may also
be questioned, since few institutions are likely to be able to afford the constant reproduction of information on this scale. One possibility, obviously enough, is to provide an introduction to the subject-matter of the archives by circulating the **Descriptive Lists**, which are simple to use and direct in application. But since the listing of the contents of all series within a repository is neither necessary nor practicable, a complete set of **Descriptive Lists** could never offer anything more than an introduction to selected series.

For the purposes of circulation, then, the solution appears to lie in retaining the series as the unit of description and supplying a précis of the contents of only the most general series, not for every series as is done in the **Preliminary Inventory**. Instead of prefacing these entries with a narrative history of each department and its archives, it would be enough simply to supply a list of the legislation and other responsibilities administered by each department.

**Example VII**

**DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**

Established : 1 Jan. 1901.
Abolished : 17 Nov. 1916.

**ACTS ADMINISTERED.**

**Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901-1906.**

No. 16 of 1901. Assented to : 17 Dec. 1901.
No. 22 of 1906. Assented to : 12 Oct. 1906.

**Immigration Restriction Act 1901-1910.**

Proclaimed date of enforcement : 1 Feb. 1906.
Royal Commissions Act 1902-1912.

No. 12 of 1902. Assented to: 8 Sept. 1902.
No. 4 of 1912. Assented to: 19 Sept. 1912.

Administration of this Act transferred to Prime Minister's Department, 1912.

Naturalization Act 1903.

No. 11 of 1903. Assented to: 13 Oct. 1903.
Proclaimed date of enforcement: 1 Jan. 1904.

ETC.

OTHER MATTERS ADMINISTERED.

Communications with the Governor-General, 1901-1904.

Transferred to the Prime Minister's Office of the Department of External Affairs, June 1904.

Communications with the States, 1901-1904.

Transferred to the Prime Minister's Office of the Department of External Affairs, June 1904.

External Affairs, 1901 -

Fisheries (Extra Territorial), 1901 -

Influx of Criminals, 1901 -

Officers of Parliament, 1901-1912.

Transferred to Prime Minister's Department, April 1912.

Commonwealth Gazette, 1906-1912.

Transferred to Prime Minister's Department, May 1912.

ETC.
LIST OF SERIES.

1. Central Office.

E.A. 1. General Correspondence 1901. 15 ft.
E.A. 2. Number Register and Index to General Correspondence, 1901.

ETC.

If, when all these departmental entries were brought together to form a Guide, the legislation and functions attributable to every department were brought together at the rear of the volume to form an index, the result would be to create a Guide which induces the inquirer to proceed by reference to the structure of government machinery and which offers a reasonable conspectus of the contents of the repository.

It is true that such an instrument would suffer from one shortcoming of the Preliminary Inventories in that it would still provide only the most general information for the most miscellaneous series. But given the diverse subject-matter of many modern departmental series of correspondence, it seems unavoidable that the Guide must function, on occasions, as little more than a means of narrowing down the number of series whose contents will have to be investigated in more detail.

Such a Guide has its place, of course, not only on the shelves of libraries but also as part of the Search Room equipment. For series whose scope is well-defined, no description of their subject-
matter other than the entry in the Guide need be provided. Such an entry as:

Correspondence relating to the claims of Burns Philp and Co. against the Government of the German Protectorate of the Marshall and Caroline Islands, 1904-1908. 1 ft.

needs no further elaboration to be of assistance to the student public. On the other hand, where the subject-matter of a series is diverse, what has to be provided in the Search Room is a separate and distinct instrument pitched at quite a different level of detail. Something on these lines has been attempted already and indeed, a number of rules for such a proceeding have been prepared. But these, though perhaps suitable enough to meet the particular task for which they were framed, have little to recommend them for general application. This, by any standards, is a formidable undertaking and one in which there can be no room for recording such details as the dimensions of items, whether letters are autograph, signed or unsigned, and the number of pages of each. Such requirements make no concessions either to the volume of modern departmental correspondence nor to the problems of applying procedures designed originally for series of individual papers to those which are now composed of files. The purpose of a Descriptive List is, after all, chiefly one of demonstrating the subject-matter of a series, item by item, and beyond some form of identification, a summary of content is the only essential.

Example VIII


1. Application by J. Fortescue for permission to dedicate a volume of poems to the Prime Minister, together with a letter conveying official approval. 6 - 10 June 1903.

11. Suggested Rules for a Descriptive List, compiled in the School of Pacific Studies of the Australian National University (June, 1954).
Example VIII (cont.)

2. Memorial from the Bungendore Chamber of Commerce concerning the safeguarding of Australian commercial interests in the New Hebrides. 12 June 1903.

Where a series is made up of 'case' files or 'particular instance' papers, where, that is to say, the contents of files or papers follow a standard, predictable pattern, it may be profitable to provide an index to the names of the persons involved as an inexpensive but effective alternative to a Descriptive List. This could be done in the case of the Correspondence, 'E' (Employment) series.

These are operations which serve all sections of the student public as well as every form of inquiry, and they go a long way towards meeting the majority of inquiries by which the archivist is likely to be faced. The selection of a series, possibly the examination of a Descriptive List, the discovering of an item or items - these, more often than not, are the only steps required. But sometimes the proceedings are more complicated than that; sometimes it is necessary to examine and perhaps take steps to counter the effects of the operation of the machinery of government and the development of administrative method. To find an item, to explain a signature, a minute, or the influences which have shaped a decision or the composition of the evidence - all these are problems whose solution, as has already been suggested, can depend on the more technical matters of archive-making and archive history.

In this connection we may set out three requirements which the
archivist has to meet in preparing each Group or other body of material for use. Of these, the most difficult to define is the preparation of the narrative introduction outlining the administrative circumstances in which the archives were created. The problem which is particularly acute in the case of modern departmental archives is chiefly one of setting limits to the scope of the narrative. Though each must obviously vary greatly in length according to the complexity of the information which has to be imparted, none should go beyond the bounds of discussing the administrative responsibilities of the department or office, its structure and the lines of communication which were followed both within the department and in its external relations. Should the history of any of the archives after their creation have been in any way remarkable, such information might be accommodated in an additional section of the narrative. Lists of all officers who are likely to have signed letters or to have figured in marginal notations can also be usefully compiled, but other personalia, anecdotes and details which more properly belong to the wider field of public administration can rarely be justified in a narrative whose chief purpose is to assist in the use of the archives. Even these modest requirements would in the case of the New South Wales Lands Department, for example, necessitate an Introduction of considerable length.

As far as each series within a Group is concerned, the information required falls into two categories. In the first place, the administ-

12. This is something of a novelty and may entail a considerable amount of work. But the relevance of such information to an explanation of certain contents and also the structure of a body of archives seems quite obvious.
relative pedigree of each series has to be recorded; that is to say, a note has to be made of the series (singular or plural) from which the present series (singular) originally derived both papers and functions, and of the series (singular or plural) by which (on the decease of the present series) its functions and active papers were inherited. Without information of this sort it would be impossible to establish the pattern of related series both within the Group and in other Groups, a pattern which has evolved as a result of continual changes in the structure of government. As a result, it would be difficult not only to trace the arrangements made for the conduct of particular classes of business from one period to another, but also (as a result) to explain the composition and whereabouts of certain files. In addition, some details of the way in which the series was compiled or operated are required. For registry archives, it is necessary to record how papers were registered, classified and indexed; in the case of form-type archives, how the information which they contain was compiled and how it is presented. Descriptions of this sort preferably should avoid the use of words in special ways whenever possible, and if necessary include an example to illustrate the points being made.

Both the pedigree of each series and the description of its character might be combined conveniently in one form of record which, for present purposes, we shall call the History Sheet. This record can be prepared as soon as the series within a Group have been identified and might be set out as follows:
Example IX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>SERIES No.</th>
<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>SERIES No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External Affairs</td>
<td>E.A. 7</td>
<td>External Affairs</td>
<td>E.A. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Affairs</td>
<td>E.A. 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DERIVATION:**

**OPERATION:** Details of the first page received on a new subject were entered in a register, each page of which was reserved for a particular subject. (For register see E.A. 4). That paper was thereafter referred to by the prefix A, the year number, page number of the register, and by the number of its position on the page of the register. A typical number would be A 02/15/11, where 02 is the year 1902, 15 the page and 11 the item on that page. There was not always a set order for page and item number and occasionally they were written vertically i.e., 15/02 or 11/15/02. This may cause confusion when consulting the records and should be specially noted. Papers received subsequently on the same transaction, which were entered in the register, received separate item numbers.

The related papers were assembled in file form and pinned at the top left hand corner. They are frequently in jackets which carry title and file number. Copies of relevant outward letters were included in the files and extra copies were placed in outward letterbooks, which no longer exist. Occasionally an outward letter which initiated a transaction was registered as above and began, or was included in a similar file. The most recent papers were usually added to the bottom of the file and therefore it may be read in the same order as a book.

For index and transmission book relating to this series see E.A. 5 and 6.
The remaining problem, that of items removed from a given series, may be met in more than one way. In some cases the transmission of papers or files has been done methodically, with the new location of the items marked alongside the original register entry. Here, nothing is necessary beyond an examination of the accuracy of such entries. But equally, items may have been transmitted by irregular or informal means. Where the series concerned has been controlled by a register, and where the latter is still extant, there is no reason why the existing entries should not be amended or supplemented. Where, on the other hand, the register governing the series in which items originated is no longer in existence, it would be sufficient to prepare what might be called a Skeleton Register. This Register need be divided into no more than two columns, in the first being recorded the registration number of the item in question and in the second, its present archive number. Thus if a paper - 16/4972 - originated in the General Correspondence Series (1903-1916) of External Affairs as part of a file and was incorporated subsequently into the General Correspondence of the Department of Home and Territories, the present archive number of the file - H. & T. 103/59543 - would be entered in the second column:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dept. No.</th>
<th>Archive No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/4972</td>
<td>H. &amp; T. 103/59543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/4973</td>
<td>E.A. 27/3684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/4974</td>
<td>P.M. 208/19742</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There seems to be little point in attempting to circulate the more technical information of this sort. The narrative introduction is not intended to be a study of a department or office in its own right, but is a discussion of such aspects of its economy and history as reflect directly on the organisation and character of a given body of archives. Similarly, the History Sheets and the Skeleton Registers have little meaning or purpose when divorced from the archives to which they relate. Descriptive aids of this variety are more at home in the Search Room of an archives institution than on the shelves of a public library.

Taken together, the aids relating to subject-matter and those devoted to the structure and character of the archives as archives provide every kind of assistance which is likely to be required by archivist and student public alike. The Guide, circulated to libraries and other learned institutions offers as comprehensive an introduction to the scope of the archives as modern conditions seem to permit. In the Search Room the descriptive aids, arranged Group by Group, would be three in number. First a folder containing the narrative introduction to the history of the instrumentality and its archives which comprise a particular Archive Group, together with a
History Sheet for each of the series within the Group. These History Sheets provide a number of services. Not only do they offer a repertory of the series which made up the Group, but by indicating the source and successor of each series, they provide the means of ascertaining which Descriptive Lists will have to be examined in the search for related items in different but administratively connected series. Moreover, the History Sheets offer some insight into the way in which the items being consulted were assembled and controlled during their active career, as well as allowing any suspected idiosyncrasies in their composition to be tested against the technical information provided. Next in order from the folders containing the narrative introduction and the History Sheets would be a set of Descriptive Lists relating to those series for which the series title in the Guide is not an adequate description of their contents. Finally, a set of Skeleton Registers to allow the discovery of items no longer under the control of the original registry apparatus.

13. This folder differs in character from a Preliminary Inventory in many ways. It is not intended to be the principal means of introduction to a body of archives; it is not intended to be circulated generally or even to be published; it is concerned with the more technical aspects of the series which make up the Group.
If modern administrative circumstances have struck at any one side of the archivists' traditional function, it is at the preparation of descriptive aids. On the one hand, the volume of modern departmental archives makes it impossible to list every item; consequently it is necessary to strike a new balance in the description of subject-matter. On the other, the effects of new administrative circumstances have thrust themselves forward, claiming the attention of both archivist and student. The Descriptive List, as imported into Australia, is essentially a device to set out the subject-matter and salient characteristics of individual papers which are too numerous or of insufficient importance to reproduce in full or to calendar. Without adjustment, it is not easily applicable to series made up of files of papers and is a medium of description which takes no account of series composed of items too numerous or of insufficient distinction ever to be mentioned separately. Again, format and questions of cost set fatal limitations to the usefulness of the Preliminary Inventory when this is employed (as is often the case) as virtually the only form of descriptive aid. The basic fault of the Preliminary Inventory is that it has to do too much, being required to describe and publicise not only the subject-matter of a given body of archives, but also the administrative circumstances (in the fullest sense) of their creation. Description of subject-matter necessarily remains at the level of the series and consequently does less than justice to the contents of those most miscellaneous in character; over these, the Preliminary Inventory establishes no more than the most rudimentary degree of control. Unavoidable considerations of space and balance set quite arbitrary restrictions on the extent of the narrative Introduction and the
descriptive entries for individual series. It may be questioned whether provisions such as these are likely to allow an adequate presentation of the issues arising from the complicated and unstable structure of modern government, the increasingly elaborate organisation of modern departments and the diversity of record-keeping practices followed by the modern registry. These are the factors which, when allied with the volume of archives involved, have created a situation in which none of the existing descriptive aids individually or collectively can fully answer. The categories of information which the situation makes necessary are clear enough; the mode of their transmission will depend on closer examination of the different purposes which are to be served.
3. **PROBLEMS OF THE HISTORIAN.**

Historians, in general, have failed to appreciate what Professor Galbraith has called "the slowly expanding structure of the public records."¹ Such a state of affairs is doubly unfortunate, since it means that historians have not only failed to grasp the distinctive characteristic of this class of source material, but also that they cannot be in a position to appreciate the notions which underly the work of the archivist.

The organisation of the administrative arrangements in colony, state or Commonwealth, has rarely remained stable for any length of time. Such notable events as the inauguration of Responsible Government, Federation, the two World Wars; the less spectacular but equally important influences exerted by political programmes, together with the reform (for its own sake) of administrative machinery—all these have at one time or another caused alterations in the existing organisation of government. New departments created, existing ones abolished or re-modelled; new functions acquired, others lost or re-distributed—year-books, estimates and gazettes all record this chronicle of change. But although it is a history of change, it is important to note that it is also one of expansion; on balance, more departments have been created than abolished, more functions acquired than lost.

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¹ V.H. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p.4.
If the impression here is one of a continuous, organic growth, so it is also with the body of records which these operations brought into being. Not only have the records increased numerically, but the pattern on which they were accumulated has been constantly re-modelled to conform to the structure of the current administrative arrangements. Changes in the latter have often been matched by a corresponding re-organisation of the records. The transfer of a function from one department to another has required (as a rule) a similar transfer of the relevant records, if business were to continue. Similarly, a new department attracts to itself records from existing departments as a nucleus round which to assemble records of its own in the future. Either in colony, state or Commonwealth, the operation of the machinery of government creates an expanding and changing but at the same time closely integrated body of records. This is what Galbraith had in mind when he spoke of the "slowly expanding" structure of the records in the Public Record Office.

For over half a century, the task of the archivist has been conceived as one of preserving and illustrating this characteristic. Thus, for example, an archivist would not contemplate sorting through the records in his repository and bringing together in one collection all items relating to "gold", and in another, such records as bear on "exploration". There can be no question generally of 'improving' or systematising the original order of the records. Where, for special reasons, this has to be attempted, it is customarily accompanied by ample safeguards which allow the restoration of the original order. But as a rule, the archivist aims to preserve or restore the original
administrative order, the order in which the records were accumulated, with all the imperfections which thus might be perpetuated. This is not done out of sheer perversity, but from a conviction that, as Jenkinson has put it, "In this way we give the fairest opportunity to the Archive of saying what it has to say and to the student of understanding and profiting." ².

There are occasions when considerations of this sort will have little significance for the historian. A substantial class of inquiry exists for which it is sufficient to produce a text for examination and for which the administrative relationship between this and other documents, the way in which one has been connected with another, are not relevant considerations. It would be unreasonable to expect a historian who seeks an answer to a simple question - the date of an appointment, the text of a submission - to examine the organisation of a department and the character of its records as a preliminary to his inquiry. But let the historian proceed further and inquire why the appointment was made, on what evidence the submission was based, or perhaps make a more extensive form of inquiry into the conduct of a whole class of business, and a new set of factors present themselves for his consideration. In other words, let the historian re-vivify the archives and it becomes of some importance to know how and why they have assumed their present shape, if the questions "on what evidence was official action taken?" and "how does my evidence compare with it?" are to be answered satisfactorily.

Departmental records from any given period will have been compiled within a distinctive administrative framework. Inside the department or office, set routines governed the conduct of daily affairs. The receipt, classification and control of papers were the subject of prescribed procedures. Papers would be received at appointed times and, by being registered and indexed under the provisions of the registry system in vogue, would be made part of the 'record' of the department. These papers, joined by others which related to the same subject, would then be marked for distribution to clerical officers and transmitted along established lines of internal communication. Where sections or branches existed to deal with particular aspects of business, the destination of newly received papers would be obvious; but even where the mass of clerks remained undifferentiated in their responsibilities, convenience might dictate that the same clerks should receive papers concerning the same classes of business. Some transactions might be completed by the one clerk; for others, it might be necessary to refer papers to another branch, or to the chief clerk or to the Secretary himself. Again, transactions might have to be referred to other departments for advice or more specialised information, and papers from one administrative environment be brought temporarily into another, often leaving the mark of their appearance and progress on the records of the other department.

The scope for change in such arrangements as these is all too obvious. The modifications to the way in which papers are controlled and classified that have taken place, may profoundly affect both the evidence on which departmental action is based, and the way in which
this evidence is presented to later inquirers.

Example X

In 1904 a department opened a file (04/1492) and gave it the title 'Merino Sheep'. At the same time, a card was prepared which carried the title of the file, its number and space for the recording of only (it should be noted) such inwards papers as were subsequently added to the file. This card then took its place with other similar cards which had been arranged according to the alphabetical order of the titles they carried; in this way, an index to files was created.

From the outset, there were two sources of weakness. One, the failure to control all papers added to the file, was inherent in the system. Responsibility for the other—the unsatisfactory definition of the scope and the purpose of the file—can be laid squarely on the registry clerks. Did the file deal with the purchase or the breeding of merino sheep, was it concerned with their sale or slaughter?

It is not surprising that such a file grew to considerable proportions. In the first year, over 100 inwards papers are recorded as having been added to it; in the second, over 300, and in the third, over 500. In addition to these, of course, were added a proportionate number of (unrecorded) minutes, memoranda and letters in reply. Moreover, it was the practice of the registry clerks to overcome deficiencies in their classification of papers by subject by making copies of selected papers, and placing one (again unrecorded)

3. A fictitious title has been supplied, because circumstances make it undesirable that the original should be reproduced.
on each of the files to which it might conceivably be related.

Such a mass of papers presented problems of arrangement. Between 1904 and the middle of 1907, eight smaller parts were broken away from the main file, each of which ran concurrently and dealt with a more precisely defined aspect of the general subject, 'Merino Sheep'.

Towards the middle of 1907, the main file and such of the eight parts as remained in current use were reorganised into no less than 32 independent files, each with its own identification number, each with its own card to represent it in the index to record the inwards papers as they were added.

During the next two and a half years, the process which had accompanied the growth of the main file between 1904 and the middle of 1907 was repeated in the case of each of the 32 new files. It is true that it took place on a less extensive scale. For one thing, the more closely defined scope of the new files reduced the need for further division into more manageable parts. Correspondingly, there was less need to offset the effects of vague and overlapping classification by the lavish distribution of copies. But the old sources of confusion inevitably persisted. Most of the papers added went unrecorded; their location, even their existence remained unknown. Existing files continued to be subdivided, and the previous shape of evidence obscured.

Then, at the beginning of 1911, the process was reversed, at least for some of the files and their contents. The existing registry system was scrapped. In its place was installed a scheme which set out not only to classify papers on to files but also to classify (by subject) the arrangement of the files themselves. The tendency
of the family of papers and files which had grown up round the subject 'Merino Sheep' to drift further apart was arrested.

But just as some 'non-current' files had been left out of the 1907 re-arrangement, so in 1911 the dead files of the period 1907-1910 were left undisturbed. Only current or 'semi-current' papers were brought up into the new system and assembled in accordance with the new scheme of classification.

To confuse matters further, this scheme was amended in 1914 and completely replaced eight years later. On each occasion the usual weeding-out and reorganisation took place.

During the period of its growth, then, this considerable mass of papers were subjected to four major reorganisations and any number of minor readjustments. The result is to be seen in the creation of a family of between 30 and 40 files, many of whose contents have enjoyed closer and far different inter-connection, than their present disposition might suggest. At one end of the scale we have the files which died before the middle of 1907, whose contents represent an arrangement of papers which is only at one remove from that of the papers on the parent file opened in 1904. At the other end are files created under the latest system of classification, yet carrying papers which span the period back to 1904, and which find themselves in what is merely the latest of a succession of different contexts. In between are spaced the files which, having passed out of active use, remain as isolated representatives of the contemporary pattern on which papers were being arranged.

Unfortunately, however, few of the files from any period offer an obvious indication of the way in which their contents are or have been
inter-related to papers on other files; still less do they offer readily any idea of the form which this relationship took at any given time. At an estimate, rather less than a third of all the papers involved had been subjected to any degree of formal control. Such a method was considered to offer, for the conduct of current business, an adequate means of access not only to the papers so controlled, but also to the other papers (copies of related letters, memoranda, replies, etc.) which built up round them. Whether or not in practice the needs of current business were well served, is a debatable point. But there can be no question that from the point of view of preserving a record of the evidence on which official action had been based, groups of papers assembled and controlled in this way are particularly vulnerable to any form of reorganisation. Four times a mass of papers of virtually unknown dimensions and character has been rearranged. Without the hard core of registered papers and the cards which controlled them, it would be difficult to discover the course of development which has been set out above. Without such assistance, it would be difficult task to reconstruct the former relationship of the papers now on existing files. Yet it is desirable that this family connection should be detected, for it can have an important bearing on our own judgement of events. Without such information, we can hardly be in a position to assess the nature of the evidence either as it is presented now, or as it was in the period covered by our inquiries.
CHART VI
In the larger sphere of the organisation of government, the pattern of departments has varied from one period to another. These events have often reacted directly on the existing structure of records. Present associations have been dissolved, as records perhaps of common origin and certainly of related subject-matter have been moved through new and dissimilar administrative environments.

Example XI See Chart VI

This table illustrates the principle series of correspondence from which the five territories named have been administered between 1901 and 1950. In that period, the administration of each territory was connected with a number of series. Matters relating to the Northern Territory, for example, began in one, were transferred to another in 1912 and in 1925 were transferred to the original series which at this time also controlled the current records relating to both Norfolk Island and Papua. At each change, unwanted records were left behind. Because this practice was repeated on similar occasions in connection with other series and other territories, material relating to all the Commonwealth territories is now to be found in a variety of series scattered through seven Archive Groups - (1) External Affairs, (1) Home Affairs, (2) Home Affairs, Prime Minister's, Home and Territories, Interior and External Territories.

The fact that related archives exist in different Archive Groups is a matter in which the historian may fairly expect to rely on the archivist for guidance. But the fact that archives are distributed in this way is something which has implications for the historian himself. Whether inspired by a reform of the registry (e.g. Northern Territory, 1925) or by a reconstruction of the organisation of government as a
whole (e.g. Norfolk Island, Papua and New Guinea, 1928), changes in the distribution of records substituted one mould for another over the records transferred. Not only did they come (as likely as not) under the influence of a new registry system, with different ways of classing and controlling material, but also they were put to work in a new administrative environment, functioning in a different departmental organisation and following different channels of communication both within and outside the department. Due account must be taken of these influences on structure and content when examining material which, though related in subject-matter, is found in different Archive Groups. This circumstance reflects, in itself, the existence of different administrative associations among the archives concerned.

Precisely because archives are maintained in their natural or original order, the issues which face the archivist in determining the administrative association of records in general may also confront the historian in his search for and examination of individual items. Like the archivist, the historian is concerned with institutions and practices which are constantly in a state of evolution. The means by which the historian is to be introduced to what is so often a novel environment, depend, it has been suggested, on the purpose of the information which has to be conveyed. But few archivists in Australia
would question the need (in some form or another) for a history of the organisation and functions of the department or office by which records have been created. Again, it seems obvious enough that the subject-matter of the records in each series of papers has to be indicated adequately, whether by a general description to cover all the contents of a series or by a list of individual items. Nor is it possible to ignore the consequences of changes in the Administrative Arrangements, with their effects on the disposition of records. Finally, in view of the extent to which the registry and its practices may influence the character of departmental records, it seems inescapable that some comment should be made on the way in which papers have been assembled and controlled.

There is nothing in all this to suggest that the historian must become his own archivist. Nevertheless, the lines of approach which can be mapped out for the historian make a number of demands. Not the least of these is a willingness to accept and use records in the form/which the departments left them: a willingness which is based, in turn, on a recognition of the benefits resulting from an 'administrative' approach to bodies of records which have themselves been compiled in the course of administrative activities. Moreover, it is impossible to discuss the classification and control of most departmental papers in terms other than those of registry practices. The volume of records and the multiplicity of ways in which the composition of one may differ from that of another, weigh against the provision of a description which is anything more than a background for each of the series. As a
result, the archivist can do little more than set out the factors which have to be taken into account for a series as a whole, and must leave the various ways in which they may manifest themselves in particular instances to be detected by the user. The historian, concerned with individual items, cannot allow the matter to rest there. Whatever assistance the archivist may be able to provide must remain limited in scope and (from the nature of the problems at issue) technical in its content. If the historian is unfamiliar with the terms of reference employed, and is unable to recognise the implication (and therefore the application) of what the archivist has written, then he will not be able to move freely and with confidence among his records.

Most of the obstacles which may confront the historian are the result of the operation of two forces. Firstly, the employment of record-keeping systems to set the pattern on which so many bodies of departmental records have been accumulated; secondly, the transfer of records from one set of administrative or documentary associations to another—a process in which the possibilities of misfortune have been heightened by a decline in the degree of control over individual papers. The historian, confronted by a file of papers, may be faced with some or all of the results of these forces at work, and may require to bring to bear (on a limited scale) such various but connected considerations as developments in departmental structure, changes in the organisation of government and reform in the devices of registry. At the very least each item is worth a critical glance not, in this
CHART VII
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REFERENCES TO PAPERS ON OTHER FILES</th>
<th>SEQUENCE OF REGISTERED PAPERS ON FILE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F.C.L. 22/482</td>
<td>H. &amp; T. F.C.L. 21/2861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.C.L. 22/483</td>
<td>21/24787</td>
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Papers received while file was lent to the Chief Lands Officer. They were maintained separately and are now mislaid.
case, to determine the accuracy of the text, but to examine the other characteristics of the file as a piece of evidence.

Example XII  File 0. 29/223. (See Chart VII)

At first sight, the present composition of the Federal Capital Commission file 0. 29/223 is something of a puzzle. That its make-up is disorderly is clear to the least practised eye; to a more discerning eye, the file obviously includes papers from six different series, implying a shift from time to time of its administrative connections. By using the information provided by the file itself as well as that offered by the various registers and indexes which have controlled the papers from time to time, what is there to be deduced concerning the character of this piece of evidence?

The earliest set of papers (F.C.L. 21/1861 - 21/29828) are derived from a file which began its career in the 'Federal Capital' series of the Lands and Survey Branch of the Department of Home and Territories and was then transferred to the series of General Correspondence maintained by the Head Office of that department. There, the file was extended until the end of 1924, during which time the terms of a proposed Ordinance were discussed between the Secretary, Department of Home and Territories, the Secretary, Department of Health, the Attorney-General's Department and the Surveyor-General.

At the end of 1924, responsibility for all aspects of administration in the Federal Territory passed from the direct control of the Department of Home and Territories and was vested in the recently established Federal Capital Commission. This body, disposed to take action in the matter of the proposed Ordinance, requested (on file F.C.C. 25/358)
that the file then in the Head Office of Home and Territories should be transferred to Canberra. In March 1925, this was done and the papers so transferred (F.C.C. 21/1861 - 2h/29828) came to form the earlier papers on the new Commission file 25/358. This file continued in operation until the end of April when it was lent to the Chief Lands Officer of the Federal Capital Commission (formerly the Surveyor-General). That officer, when returning the file, attached to it a number of papers from the old Surveyor-General's 'General' series of correspondence (G 23/945 and G 23/1768) which represent, in fact, the Canberra end of the correspondence carried on between the Surveyor-General and the Secretary, Department of Home and Territories, on the former file of that department, F.C.L. 21/1861 - 2h/29828.

In the middle of 1925, the Federal Capital Commission file 25/1312 was transferred, as it now stood, to the new 'L' or 'Lands' series of the Commission, where it remained until the beginning of 1929, when all Commission files relating to Ordinances were brought together to form a new 'O' or 'Ordinance' series.

During these proceedings the papers from the Head Office of Home and Territories and the Surveyor-General had been much disturbed. Nearly all the registered papers which should be present are, in fact, on the file, but not in their original order; the same is true presumably of the numerous unregistered papers or of the many papers which share one registration number. Two registered papers (together with an unknown number of unregistered but related papers) are missing. They are numbered 25/1427 and 25/1429 respectively, and were received while the Federal Capital Commission file was with the Chief Lands
These papers were not attached to the file and now cannot be discovered. A précis of their subject-matter is provided by the entry on the Index Card; a similar entry shows that the register is in error in attributing outward paper (25/1428) to the same file.

Between 1921 and 1929, a number of communications were addressed to other offices and departments where, on receipt of these letters, new files would be created. These constitute a number of satellites gathered round the Federal Capital Commission file, each recording how a decision was made or an opinion formulated, in an administrative context quite different from that in which the Commission file was being compiled and yet each one directly affecting business being conducted on that file. From references to registry symbols it appears that related material is to be found in the Federal Capital Lands and the General Correspondence series of Home and Territories, in two series of the Commonwealth Department of Health, in the General Correspondence series of the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, in a series in the Commonwealth Crown Solicitor's Office and in a 'D' series of the New South Wales Department of Agriculture.

Is the sequence of papers complete? By whom has it been consulted? Has it been re-arranged? Is there related material in other series of the same or other departments? To answer or even to ask these questions the historian will be obliged to add to his resources, at least to the extent of cultivating an insight into the ways in which our present inheritance of departmental records was brought into being. The additions are not formidable; they are in no way
as formidable, for instance, as the study of palaeography and
diplomatic which is readily accepted as a necessary preliminary to the
use of older records. But such as they are, the additions cannot
profitably be ignored. On them depends an ability to recognise the
consequences of evolution in the making and keeping of departmental
records - a process which in Australia began well over a hundred
years ago, and which continues today.
CONCLUSION.

By the time that colonial archives begin, the problems associated with the administration and use of older records - script, language and chronology - have little significance. But since the middle of the last century, attempts to meet the situation created by a growing volume of records together with the increasing complexity and instability of the instruments of government, have raised a new order of problems in both the administration and use of departmental archives.

The arrangement whereby letters were placed chronologically in two separate series of 'papers received' and 'papers despatched' was admirably uncomplicated and put no strain on the abilities of the clerks who had to maintain the records. But a moment's reflection suggests one fatal weakness. To pursue a particular line of inquiry, it is necessary to begin afresh on each occasion to assemble the relevant papers. The history of a particular piece of business might lead from inwards series to outwards series and back again half a dozen or a dozen times. A new line of interest requires a new and laborious collecting of papers. It became an intolerable burden for the departments to be faced continually with the need to seek out and assemble papers before justifying a particular action or continuing a particular piece of business. The obvious solution was to abandon the simple chronological arrangement of papers and to record, permanently, the connection between each in relation to a chosen subject or theme.
The change, though inevitable, has not been entirely for the better. Departmental registries have traditionally been concerned with the identity and well-being of individual papers, and while the new procedures could be grafted on to the old, while individual documents could first be registered or otherwise identified chronologically and then classified by subject, all was well. But the rising tide of papers which had brought about the first change, cafried the registry and its procedures still further from this original position. Under such pressure, the conception of the function of the registry gradually changed; in the larger departments at least, circumstances compelled the registries to become preoccupied with the marshalling of papers rather than with enrolling them. The systems of 'control' touched fewer and fewer papers individually. Often, indeed, they did little more than provide for the registration of selected papers, and thus construct a framework to which the remainder (and the greatest bulk) of the papers could be attached in unknown quantities and in more or less consistent fashion.

The uncertainties created by such practices have been increased when for one reason or another, a body of departmental records has been disturbed either during or after its growth. There have been two principal causes of disruption. The first stems from a persistent inclination to improve the methods at the disposal of the registry. Here the card index and decimal systems method of classification have been the most notable intruders. Their influence has been brought into the registry in a variety of forms and from a variety of sources, not
least among which must be numbered proprietary 'office systems' and, more recently, inquiries into departmental organization and methods. The result has been that registries from time to time have modified or abandoned their existing practices in favour of others which seemingly offered simple or more subtle methods by which records might be organized. This in itself is an acceptable, even necessary practice. But it does mean that the pattern on which a body of registry records has been accumulated may vary from period to period.

The other complicating factor is to be found in the extent to which the instruments of government, individually and collectively, have been re-shaped over the years. Within the departments, the growth from the simplest beginnings to the complicated structures of the present day has led to the evolution of increasingly sophisticated forms of internal organization, with elaborate hierarchies, well-defined channels of communication and an increasing specialization of function among the departmental officers. All this has left its mark on the face and composition of the archives. Externally, the structure of government as a whole has undergone constant modification and expansion. These processes have reacted directly on an ever-growing body of departmental records, causing their frequent redistribution and fragmentation, ultimately producing Archive Groups which are great in number, small in size and related administratively to an increasing degree.

None of these developments seem to have affected the traditional problems of arrangement in any way. If the archivist chooses to
arrange the archives by reference to their administrative origins as opposed to their subject-matter, the perennial questions of what is the group and what is the series raise themselves, to be answered with consistency in the majority of cases and with the usual arbitrariness when dealing with the fringes of administrative organisation and records which have been kept informally. So too, the question as to the extent to which the arrangement of the archives in the repository can follow the organisation of the instrumentality by which they were created, depends for an answer, as always, on the extent to which the original organisation of the records has followed the structure of the department. Where the novelty lies for the government archivist in Australia is in the matter of description and this situation is due almost entirely to the scale on which administrative methods and organisation have begun to evolve in modern times. Thus the ways in which records have been kept must become an increasing pre-occupation for the archivist not only because of the sheer numbers of registry systems which have functioned in modern times, but also because of their diversity and the variety of their impress on the bodies of records which they have called into being. Again the inherent difficulties of describing succinctly the instruments of such aspects of government as relate to the archives are heightened when these institutions and their administrative practices are in a state of rapid evolution and expansion. New circumstances such as these have set their own problems of exposition.

A new emphasis on description merely underlines the weakness of the archivist's equipment in this direction. None of the repertory
of existing descriptive aids has been designed with the present situation in view; most have resulted from successive curtailments of practices which for one reason or another have become too elaborate to be practicable propositions. This is not precisely the case at the present juncture. The categories and levels of information which these descriptive aids supply are all, at one time or another, applicable to the description and employment of modern departmental archives. What is wanted now is not so much a curtailment as a redistribution, taking into account the purpose of such information as well as the point at which it is to be applied, and allowing each category to be brought into play when required. To achieve this state of affairs, a fundamental distinction has to be made between the subject-matter of archives and the technical information required for their identification and use; a distinction which in general terms is one between lists of series or individual archives on the one hand, and narratives devoted to their administrative associations on the other. Any attempt to combine the two merely sets arbitrary limits to the size and character of each, at a time when both require every degree of flexibility to meet the claims of the archives. But this is not to suggest that the functions of these descriptive aids should not be closely integrated. Indeed the economic possibilities of providing both material for circulation and comprehensive assistance in the Search Room depends on the creation of a unified system of descriptive aids, in which there is little duplication of purpose.

None of these issues could present themselves in a recognisable form for consideration while the majority of records remained in
departmental custody. Between the two World Wars, however, activities on the part of public libraries began to have some effect. But although the transfer of some of the seemingly choicer records to the custody of these institutions was, in some respects, an improvement on previous arrangements, it still left both the records and the historian inadequately served. Too much still depended on private enthusiasm and initiative. Moreover, the fragmentary and intermittent nature of the transfers not only offered little hope for the thousands of feet of records still confined in departments, but also gave no warning of the problems which would have to be faced in providing adequately for the care and maintenance of the vast legacy from the past which the departments had to offer. Within the last ten or twelve years, however, a new factor has emerged which, if it has not yet entirely transformed the scene, promises to do much for the well-being of the records. For a variety of reasons, one department after another is abandoning the long-standing indifference to the fate of its older records; the adequate maintenance of this material has become a precept of public administration. The quality and completeness of the arrangements vary greatly from department to department and from one government to another. But speaking generally, it is safe to say that never before in Australia have the provisions for the administration of departmental archives been so systematic, comprehensive and continuous.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

THE ACTIVITIES OF PUBLIC SERVICE AUTHORITIES IN CONNECTION WITH
THE REVIEW OF DEPARTMENTAL RECORD-KEEPING PRACTICES.

In 1904, the Public Service Board of New South Wales spoke out strongly against what it called 'recapitulation'; the endless checking of one officer's work by another, the excessive piling up of papers, minutes, and recapitulations - the repetition of what 'B' has said to 'C' and what 'A' previously said to 'B'. This, quite obviously, was a complaint which touched generally on the character and quality of the records being created by departments. In the following year the Board came closer to the heart of things by launching an inquiry into the merits of the central as opposed to the sectional registry in departments, and into the applicability of the by then quite popular methods of card indexing.

Important as this event may have been, however, the real opportunity to regulate departmental methods came with the re-establishment of an Investigation Branch. This step was taken, the Public Service Board reported in 1913, "because on the one hand the rapid growth of the Departments was causing a large expansion in the work of the

2. See above, Part II, Chapter 1, pp.17-47. 101-103.
Selection Committees, and, on the other hand, the Board desired to take steps for a thorough investigation into the business methods employed in the various Departments, as well as into the question of the sufficiency or otherwise of the staffs employed in the Departments. 3.

Accordingly an officer was transferred from the inspection staff of the Audit Office and was appointed as Inspector and Investigating Officer to the Public Service Board on 1 April 1912. 4. Two years later, in March 1914, H.T. Thornton was added to the staff of the Investigation Branch as Junior Inspector, 5. and it is largely the activities of this officer, together with those of his later and more junior colleagues, which can be traced from the office records of the Board in Sydney.

Between 1914 (when the bulk of the records relating to these activities begin) and 1939 (when this present inquiry ends) the staff of Public Service Inspectors investigated the working of a succession of public departments. During these investigations, the Inspectors uncovered a number of interesting situations. In one department, remarkably elaborate measures were taken for the control of official papers. Each branch maintained its own system to control such records as it received from the central registry, and some of these systems were


quite complicated. One branch, for example, maintained a register which showed the registration number of each paper, its subject-matter and a record of its movement. In turn, this register was supported by a card index covering all matters which came into the branch.

"The Record," wrote the Inspector, "is fuller than the original Index maintained in General Records." Here, a solution was found in the use of a register only, recording the registration number and movement of each item. In the basement of another department, Thornton discovered a clerk whose duties included going through the departmental records prior to 1850, re-arranging them (as the clerk expressed it) "in the modern style," taking notes of the historically important papers, and preparing a catalogue thereof. In the event, this unusual aspect of record-keeping was passed over without comment in favour of such matters as an improvement in the administrative relation of one branch to another and the speedier circulation of papers among departmental officers. Matters of this sort, in fact, formed the staple diet of the inspectorate as it moved from one department to another. In most instances, the proceedings seem to have taken a similar form. First came the initial visit, in the course of which the inspector moved through the whole of the department or office under review, inquiring from each officer the scope of his duties. This information was then converted into the first part of a Report, being set down branch by branch and officer by officer, but

6. N.S.W. Public Service Board. General Correspondence, 36/13813. Inspector's Report, undated.

(to judge from the surviving records) without any attempt to reproduce the organisation in question in graphic or chart form. Next would come the list of proposed reforms designed to secure improvement or greater economy, again with little attempt to indicate how the new arrangements as a whole would differ from the old. Finally, the proposals would be submitted for comment and criticism by the department concerned. There was, of course, no direct means of compelling a department to accept the advice offered. A great deal must have depended on tact and persuasion, and many suggestions foundered when they collided with petty tradition or the attitude of clerks who were incapable of regarding the simplest operation in any but the most complicated terms. Not that all the suggestions made by the Inspectors were well founded. The essence of the card systems which had been introduced to the New South Wales public service between 1905 and 1907 was that the cards should largely supplant the register, leaving the latter to provide no more than the next available registration number for each paper received, and some key to the card on which the other details of that (and related papers) could be found. It comes as something of a surprise, therefore, to find that one inspector, when confronted by such a system in operation, suggested that the existing register be altered "so as to show more fully the subject of the paper registered instead of symbols connecting it with index cards." The clerk to whom the suggestion was referred commented, quite rightly, that "If the suggested elaboration of the skeleton register ... is carried out, it will practically be a return to the System of Records in vogue in this Department from 1827 to 1906 inclusive, the only
difference being the indexing on cards instead of in a book."

An occurrence like this suggests a degree of unfamiliarity with the courses along which registry practices had been developing. Such a situation is not to be wondered at. The Inspectors were, after all, novices in a new field of administrative activity. As yet no one recognised the need to investigate registry practices systematically, and from this to prepare both an accurate method of diagnosis and an approved set of remedies. Given these circumstances, each issue was inevitably seen not as the manifestation of a larger problem, but as something quite isolated and best treated by the application of common sense. This probably accounts for the slightly amateur approach characterising many of these inquiries, and it is a curious contrast that while being as destitute of technical resources as their colleagues elsewhere, the Commonwealth inspectorate managed to achieve a more businesslike standard and to speak with a more consistent voice.

The situation which confronted the Commonwealth Commissioner in 1902 was an unusual one. Only two years after its creation, the functioning of an entire governmental machine was to be open to the scrutiny of a permanently constituted authority, charged with supervising all aspects of departmental efficiency. The Public Service which it was to regulate possessed few administrative traditions of its own, relying instead on a collection of precedents and practices inherited from six diverse colonial administrations. There was an

obvious need to examine the entire legacy in a critical fashion, and the examiners had received a wide mandate under section eight of the 1902 Public Service Act. If recruitment, promotion and other problems connected with employment had to be settled first, there was no reason why these issues should permanently pre-occupy the Commissioner and his staff. The possible application of the new 'business' methods to Government offices had already been suggested by external critics, and for the Commonwealth, with its newly created administrative machine, circumstances could never again be as propitious for the introduction of whichever elements of the new methods appeared suitable for public service use.

A great deal depended on the inclinations of the first Commissioner. To judge from his annual Reports, at least, he was an official with considerable breadth of interest, fully aware of the range of problems which confronted the new Public Service, and numbering amongst these as one due for early attention, the administration of departmental correspondence. In his second Report, the Public Service Commissioner wrote, "any attempt on my part to eradicate the stereotyped methods, conservative ideas, and hoary traditions that have throughout the past half-century secured so firm a foothold in Public Service administration in these States, can only be effectuated by degrees - by evolutionary rather than revolutionary methods. However it is my intention ... that those Commonwealth Departments shall be conducted on the most advanced and economic business lines consistent with due efficiency." He was prepared to admit that "in the working of

large public Departments ... a certain amount of official procedure, formality, and routine, is indispensable which is not necessary in the conduct of a private business ... in short, where matters may have to be referred to years hence, when the present generation of officials is past and gone, it is necessary that there should be in the public archives ample record of what was done, and the reasons for it." 10. But he expressed a determination to reduce the "prolix methods" then in use to a system which was more in accord with "sound business principles." 11. By the end of 1908 he felt that "the turning point has been reached in departmental organization by the substitution of advanced ideas conforming with the methods of modern commercial and industrial institutions for those formerly sanctioned by long usage and practice." 12.

Turning to examine the work of the Office in detail, it comes as something of a surprise, therefore, to find little evidence to sustain the impression created by the Reports. 13. Only one instance remains

10. Ibid., p.43.
11. Ibid., p.43.
13. The surviving archives of the Public Service Commissioner's Office do not permit an exhaustive inquiry into these matters, since many files have now been destroyed, and it is difficult to supply the gaps from the indexes, since these are defective for this period. All the archives which remain have been searched, and there is every likelihood that files dealing with departmental inquiries and the administration of correspondence would not have been destroyed since such documents were unlikely to come within the category of 'routine' as understood by the Office. Nor has anything so far emerged from the archives of other contemporary departments to suggest that the impression given by the surviving files of the Public Service Commissioner is a false one.
to show the Office directly concerning itself with methods of record-keeping, and this illustrates how limited was the interest in, and comprehension of, what was being said and done by others with a greater concern for the same set of problems.

In the middle of 1913, the Commissioner's Office received a copy of the Report issued by the Committee appointed by the New Zealand Government to inquire into the record-systems used by government departments. This must have been quite the most useful and comprehensive statement of problems connected with the administration of correspondence which the Commissioner had seen to date. It touched on many aspects of record-keeping, of which no two were more important than the control of 'active' correspondence and the destruction of such papers when they became 'dead'. The latter, it may be said by way of excuse, was not to become a pressing matter for another six years in the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, the comment of the Public Service Commissioner's staff, that it "doubted whether it would be safe" because "some of our 'dead' files have a knack of coming to life," reveals a failure to appreciate the realities of the situation, as well as a range of vision which apparently did not extend beyond the circumstances within their own office.

Again, the Report quite clearly considers the question of the decline in the use of registration for the control of individual papers. This, even by 1913, was a problem with a long history: the development

14. C.A.O. C.P. 121, Series 1, 16/7239. See also Appendix B below.
had begun well before the end of the last century. Uncertainties which were by now manifest in many of the systems used to control general departmental correspondence (including some of those within the Commonwealth) were simply the consequences of adaptations made previously in an attempt to compromise between the traditionally elaborate methods of registries and the pressure created by a growing volume of work. Yet the Public Service Commissioner's Office remarked, on this point, that its own unrecorded papers were filed alphabetically, quite failing to appreciate that the observations of the New Zealand Report were not directed at 'case' or 'staff' records (or papers of a similar nature), but at those series of correspondence which, while nominally under the control of a recording system, were being less and less comprehensively controlled.

In the history of record-keeping practices within the Commonwealth, the period between 1902 and 1922 is of considerable importance. It saw the first attempts being made to consider the introduction of some degree of standardisation; in 1906 the first true 'classified' system of keeping was introduced; in 1910-1911 the first widespread experiments

15. Two interesting attempts were made in 1901 and 1904 to secure some standardisation and co-ordination in methods, but both failed. The first attempt was premature, and the second foundered on the prejudices which were already hardening in the departments, predisposing them to favour this or that method.
were made with 'business' methods. And, perhaps most important of all, in 1912 began the first real move towards the substitution of classification of papers by subject for registration in the control of papers. Finally, in the years immediately following the First World War occurred the first general destruction of 'useless' departmental correspondence.

From such experiments and improvements in the methods of record-keeping, the Public Service Commissioner's Office apparently stood completely aside. There is a striking difference not only between the sentiments of the Reports and the evidence of the archives, but also between the achievements of the period 1902-1922 and those which followed the passing of the Public Service Act of 1922. In 1922 the Acting Commissioner wrote: "It has long been recognized that with the present limited organization it is impossible for the inspectorial staff to conduct the intensive and frequent inspections of Departments which is necessary to secure the best staffing results. Much of the time of the Inspectors is taken up in dealing with the problems arising out of the many aspects of the awards and regulations which are continually presenting themselves for elucidation to the detriment of other important sections of their duties." There is every indication

16. The history of these events is obscure, since what evidence remains is now fragmentary. But this is sufficient to suggest that an enterprising Melbourne firm which specialized in 'business systems' canvassed at least five of the eight Commonwealth department, and found four of them receptive to suggested changes.

that such indeed was the case, and if so, it must have been quite crippling in its effects. Ideally, of course, a special section should have been created within the Public Service Commissioner's Office, with the sole function of investigating ways to improve administrative method, including the administration of correspondence. It may well be that the idea of such an undertaking would have been inconceivable in this early period. If so, then the least that could be attempted, with any hope of achieving a satisfactory result, would have been the regular visiting of other Commonwealth departments, to consider, comparatively, their methods and problems. The price of the failure to achieve even this was that each department went its own way, working on its own limited experience and with its own particular needs in view. When the Public Service Act of 1922 created a new and more promising situation, there was no body of experts on hand to take advantage of it, no common fund of experience on the basis of which one could be trained, and no tradition of independent investigation into the problems which they would have to face.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between the 1906 Annual Report of the Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner and the first report issued by the newly appointed Commonwealth Public Service Board in 1924. Both were, in many ways, a prospectus or programme of action, and both contain many points of similarity. Both admitted that there was room for improvement in the methods and administrative organisation to be found within the Commonwealth departments; both
were sceptical of the degree to which business methods might be applicable to public service conditions; both insisted that reform, to be lasting, should be a matter of interest to every officer, and that initiative in these matters should be encouraged from all grades of the service. But there the similarity ends. There was now a stronger and more widespread feeling of urgency; in the years immediately after the First World War, two commissions of inquiry had touched on the subject of departmental efficiency. Much of the prevailing concern which had called them into being, as well as some of their recommendations, were responsible for the provisions of Section 17 as they appeared in the new Public Service Act of 1922. The text of Section 17 makes the degree of change quite apparent:

"17 - (1) In addition to such duties as are elsewhere in this Act imposed on it, the Board shall have the following duties:

18. C.P.P., 1923 and 1923-4, Vol.II. First Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Board of Commissioners, p.65. The Board quoted with approval from the Fourth Report of the MacDonnel Royal Commission of 1914 (Great Britain): "In Parliament and elsewhere they [Ministers] are required to give explanations of every kind of action or inaction, to defend it if in accordance with precedent, to justify it if it be a new departure. Such defence or justification is impossible without the use of elaborate records, and a procedure which is usually slow in comparison with that of a business manager."

19. The Board went so far as to offer recognition of such enterprise by suitable monetary reward, and it also enlisted the aid of the Public Service Associations. Ibid., p.69. In addition, for its own information, it established an 'Economies Register,' which listed and distinguished between economies effected by the Board, its Inspectors and the Departments. C.A.O. C.P. 121, Series 1, F 24/3459. Undated instruction headed 'Economies.'

(a) to devise means for effecting economies and promoting efficiency in the management and working of Departments by -  
  (i) improved organisation and procedure;  
  (ii) closer supervision;  
  (iii) the simplification of the work of each Department, and the abolition of unnecessary work;  
  (iv) the co-ordination of the work of the various Departments;  
  (v) the limitation of the staffs of the various Departments to actual requirements, and the utilization of those staffs to the best advantage;  
  (vi) the improvement of the training of officers;  
  (vii) the avoidance of unnecessary expenditure;  
  (viii) the advising upon systems and methods adopted in regard to contracts and for obtaining supplies, and upon contracts referred to the Board by a Minister; and  
  (ix) the establishment of systems of check in order to ascertain whether the return for expenditure is adequate;  

(b) to examine the business of each Department and ascertain whether any inefficiency or lack of economy exists;  

(c) to exercise a critical oversight of the activities, and the methods of conducting the business, of each Department;  

(d) to maintain a comprehensive and continuous system of measuring and checking the economical and efficient working of each Department, and to institute standard practice and uniform instructions for carrying out recurring work; and  

(e) such other duties in relation to the Public Service as are prescribed.  

..."

Here indeed was an injunction more forceful and comprehensive than that of Section 8 in the 1902 Act. In addition, circumstances which had brought the Board into being compelled it to act in a thorough and energetic way. By the end of 1923, the Inspectorial staff had
been appointed, and on them much depended.

Initially the re-classification of positions within the public service took priority over 'Section 17' work, which took two or three years to get under way, and reached its peak only between 1928 and 1930. Nevertheless, action was taken immediately to supervise the work of the inspectors. In September 1923, weekly reports from inspectors were called for, giving details of their activities during the previous week, and also indicating (it was particularly requested) ways and means of effecting economy, and any doubts or difficulties they may have had. In 1925, the instruction was changed to provide for monthly reports, which were to be of the same scope, and in 1928, when work under Section 17 finally gathered way, the report was to contain a separate heading 'Section 17'. The monthly report of the Senior Inspector in central office was to supply a statement showing the progress of investigations under Section 17 being done from there, and also a general reference to work being done under this heading in the several states.

At the same time, the Inspectors were gradually provided with the backing of a special administrative organisation. In the central

21. C.P.P., 1923 and 1923-4, Vol.II. First Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Board of Commissioners, p.64. Eight inspectors were appointed. The Secretary (who was also Chief Inspector), and one of the ordinary Inspectors, were transferred directly from the former Public Service Commissioner's Office. Another Inspector had seen some years of service in the latter Office, first as clerk to the Public Service Inspector, New South Wales, and then as Public Service Inspector. The other Inspectors were drawn mainly from the ranks of officers who had been concerned with the administration of financial matters (e.g. Accountants, Finance Officers). Their ages ranged from 37 to 59 and averaged 48.
office itself, an Organisation Section appears to have been established shortly after 1924. The Section became responsible for initiating action to give effect to the provisions of Section 17, for reviewing all reports made under Section 17, for securing the co-operation of the departments and for establishing and maintaining charts and records showing the organisation of each department. In addition, the work of its staff was defined and the administrative procedure of the Section sketched out.

The administrative arrangements which had been evolved to assist the programme of Section 17 work thus contained two important elements. They provided for the creation of a special section of the Board, specially charged with administering matters connected with organisation and methods. They also provided for the Inspectors' reports to be compared and consolidated. In these respects they represented an important advance on the arrangements which had existed in the time of the Public Service Commissioner.

Under such favourable circumstances, the work of the Board could scarcely fail to make a distinct impression on the methods of administering correspondence within departments. In some cases it brought the first recognition of the need to refine and modernise, while in others it did little more than support developments already under way. But whether it enlightened or merely encouraged, it often represented the decisive step forward which was the necessary prelude to any of the

22. C.A.O. C.P. 121, Series 1, F 24/3459. Undated instruction headed 'Economies'.
more modern forms of record-keeping which are being developed at the present time. For this reason alone, it is important to examine the character of the system which the Inspectors advocated, as well as some of its implications.

The procedures put forward resembled very closely those currently used by the Board itself. Such a pattern does not seem to have been followed deliberately. In the absence of definite instructions or extensive experience, the Inspectors appear simply to have adopted the guiding principles of what was to them a familiar, useful and economical system, and used these as a yardstick when examining other systems. In their essentials, the proposals involved moving the emphasis in recording (and, therefore, in control) from the individual paper to the file of papers, the abolition of the separately maintained series of papers issued and the identification of files by a single symbol throughout their active life. Thus, the last traces of the traditionally separate inwards and outwards series of papers would be removed and the supremacy of the modern 'subject-file' confirmed. Two important consequences must follow any such course of action.

Whereas formerly papers which were assembled in files were first registered as part of an inwards or outwards series, this preliminary (and independent) record was now to be abandoned, and papers were simply to be added immediately to the file to which they belonged, without any record being made of their existence or whereabouts. This

23. For an example of an inquiry into a record-keeping system, the proposals put forward and the measures finally agreed upon, see above, Part II, Chapter 1, pp. 77-81.
does not automatically increase the risks that papers will be mislaid, or that the quality of the documentation which can be supplied on any given subject will deteriorate. But it does mean that a hitherto comparatively unimportant element in the control of papers now becomes pre-eminent. When each paper is identified, its contents and whereabouts recorded, it is of little importance ultimately how it may be classified with its fellows. If this safeguard is progressively reduced, however, it becomes necessary to exercise great care in the classification of papers, since subject-matter provides the only guide in finding and assembling required papers. This in its turn suggests the need for a staff of some ability since with the restriction of registration either to the files themselves or to a few seemingly important papers, classification, and all its problems becomes the major art of the registry.

Wherever measures for the formal control of papers are removed, then, there is always a danger that the quality of the records as pieces of evidence may decline, affecting both the operations of the department and ultimately the inquiries of the student public. This possibility does not appear to have been recognised by the Commonwealth, nor, for that matter, by the public service inspectors in New South Wales. At least there is nothing of these matters reflected in the proposals which were put to the departments concerned. This was unfortunate, since experience suggests that the departments of the day were not likely to see the problem for themselves. In two quarters at least, public service authorities contributed to the general movement towards the replacement of registration by classification as the basis
for controlling correspondence, but they did nothing to ensure that the routine required for the one was replaced by the skill required for the other. Here, in a sentence, is the measure of the success and failure of their influence.
THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE RECORD-SYSTEMS USED BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN WELLINGTON, 1912 - 1913.

One of the earliest actions taken by the newly appointed Public Service Commissioner was to examine the methods of recording correspondence employed by the departments. "During the preliminary inspections of Departments," the Commissioner reported, "it was found that there was an entire lack of uniformity in the systems adopted by the various Departments. With a view to establishing a standard system, a committee, composed of three of the Record Clerks of the larger Departments, was appointed to examine the various practices adopted, and devise a system for general use." 1 The Committee reported in February 1913 and their findings, based on an examination of the systems used by forty departments and offices, are set out in Appendix A to the first Report of the Public Service Commissioner.

It appears that the tendency to replace volumes by cards, so noticeable in Australia in the decade before the first World War, was also well under way in New Zealand during the same period. One department is reported as having had a card index in operation since 1904. However, over half the departments or offices examined were still using the traditional book registers and book indexes, either

combined in one volume or maintained separately. Five, on the other hand, had adopted a card index for use in conjunction with their book register, while four had converted both register and index to a card system.

The extent to which individual papers were still controlled is not clear. There is certainly no impression to be gained that the registration of individual papers had been abandoned generally, but what remains uncertain is whether individual papers were registered as part of an inwards or outwards series independently of the files into which they were congregated subsequently, or whether they were registered simply as part of the files to which they belonged. In two cases at least, the latter method seems to have been adopted. 2.

There seems little reason to doubt that as far as the classification of papers was concerned, the general practice was to bring together as one file all the papers relating to a particular subject, rather than to create separate docketts or jackets for each exchange of correspondence. 3.

Certain aspects of this situation did not appeal to the Committee. In the first place they detected difficulties in making a system of book records effective. The consultation of the register, they

2. Department of Defence and Lands and Surveys Department.

3. For examples of the latter practice see below, Appendix C, p. 344: 272 and Appendix D, p. 244: 275.
complained, took too long and the problems of keeping index entries in alphabetical order were insurmountable. Far better, it seemed to them, to complete the reform which had been begun in several quarters and convert all the registers and indexes to a card system. Having done this, however, the Committee proceeded to make recommendations in favour of introducing nothing less than a standard system of record-keeping for use throughout the departments of the central government. This was to be achieved by the use of what the Committee called "the series system", a method whereby papers were controlled entirely by reference to the file on which they were placed, and the files themselves were classified and numbered by reference to their subject-matter rather than to the date of their creation. Methods of this kind had been brought into Commonwealth administrative practice in 1906 when, it will be remembered, the Department of Defence introduced a new record-keeping system. It appears that in New Zealand too, the Defence Department was a pioneer in such matters with the "series system" already in operation. This system, the Committee explained, "is one that appears to be the (a) most efficient, (b) most economical, (c) simplest; and, in addition, the only one that lends itself for the formation of a uniform system in the various Departments.

It is found that in many Departments various attempts have been made, with more or less success, to keep papers relating to cognate subjects together. This method has resulted in the formation of the basis of a series system, and should be extended to include all the files of a Department.

To accomplish this it will be necessary - (1) To make a classification of the subjects dealt with. This is a matter of importance, as it will form the basis of the record system. The classification is not to be too minute - where any series is likely to be small it will generally be found better to group it with another series. (2) The classification being made, give to each class a series number, all papers of one class bearing the same series number, and each separate subject of the series bearing a subnumber.

4. See above, Part II, Chapter 1, p. 467-97
For example, if "Bicycle and motor cycles" is a series, and its serial number is No.6, every letter or document relating to bicycles and motor cycles would bear the No.6 with sub-numbers indicating its position in the separate division of the series, and the file might run somewhat as follows:

6/1 Bicycles - General questions.
2 Motor cycles - General questions.
3 Bicycles and motor cycles - Palmerston North.
4 Bicycles and motor cycles - Napier.

If it were found necessary to record any special point in respect of bicycles generally it would be given an initial number. Thus, if it were found necessary to record "Massey-Harris contract for supply of cycles," this would be 6/1 (1); 6/1 because it deals generally as to bicycles, 6/1 (1) because it deals with an item relating to the matter of bicycles generally. The next special part on this general file would be 6/1 (2), and so on."

The Committee claimed many virtues for such a system:

"(1) That all papers relating to the same class of subject are kept filed together. This will result in a great saving of time when such papers are asked for (which happens very frequently in several Departments).

(2) The papers when kept in this way are much more easily filed when action is completed. This has been found to be the experience of Record Clerks where the system is in full, as well as only in partial, operation.

(3) Important papers can be classed together, as also can unimportant ones. This is an especial advantage when the question of destruction of the unimportant papers arises.

(4) The amount of recording and indexing is greatly reduced as compared with the yearly series. Standard files in many cases need only be recorded and indexed once; whereas instances have come under our notice where files now recorded under the yearly system have been recorded and indexed as many as twelve times in a year.

(5) In the larger Departments it has the special advantage of enabling the files to be placed under the control of individuals. Where necessary a branch's work can be taken out and dealt with as a whole by the branch, though the records still form part of the general record system of the office.

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(6) It is the only system which, in our opinion, renders practicable the formation of a uniform system throughout the Service.

(7) Under such a system any Record Clerk should in a very short time be able to obtain a working knowledge of the records in any Department - an impossibility under the present system. 6.

What the Committee recommended was, in effect, that there should be a connection between the principal heads of business conducted by the department and the way in which its files were classified. Such a scheme marked the final obliteration of any remaining vestiges of the old nineteenth century schemes of registration and classification, with papers registered chronologically and each file to which they were then added left simply in order of modernity. It appears that the members of the Committee, like their counterparts in the United Kingdom Treasury later on, were prepared to introduce the practice of identifying papers solely in terms of the files to which they belonged and to accept the desirability of bringing together within one cover all papers associated with a particular piece of business. Taken together, the proposals represent a degree of reform which is surprisingly radical in character and which far surpasses in ambition anything promulgated up to that time in Australia.

6. Ibid., p. 42.
APPENDIX C

A NOTE ON REGULATIONS GOVERNING THE CONDUCT OF OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE IN FIJI, 1887 - 1912.

Between 1887 and 1912, the Government of Fiji issued three separate sets of instructions to regulate what was called the conduct of official work and correspondence. Of these instructions, the ones issued in 1909 and 1912 covered a wide variety of matters, including hours of attendance, the preparation of Annual Reports, the channels of communication to be followed, but valuable as this information is for the picture which it gives of the structure of government machinery, it has little relevance to the present inquiry. All three, however, contain a considerable amount of information on the ways in which papers were registered, indexed and classified.

1. My attention was drawn to these Regulations and to the related correspondence by Mr. A.I. Diamond, Archivist to the Government of Fiji and the Western Pacific High Commission.

2. Instructions for the use of the "Minute Paper" or Jacket Form (Suva, 1887). Archives of Fiji and the Western Pacific High Commission (hereafter referred to as Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C.) Colonial Secretary's Office (hereafter referred to as C.S.O.). General Correspondence, 87/1489; Regulations for the conduct of official business and correspondence (Suva, 1909) and Regulations for the guidance of public officers in the conduct of their official work and correspondence (Suva, 1912). Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C. C.S.O. General Correspondence, 12/4878.
Registration of Papers.

46. In the office of each Department there shall be kept a register of documents sent and received, showing all references, and the ultimate disposal of the correspondence. To all letters and other documents, entering and leaving the office, numbers shall be given and written thereon, corresponding with entries in this register; the numbers shall be consecutive and in annual series, beginning from the first of January. The entries shall show from whom each document is received or to whom sent, and its date and subject.

47. Each document received or sent must bear a number referring to a separate entry in the Departmental register. Documents should not be registered more than once, but each fresh occasion on which documents are received or despatched, referred out or returned, should be noted under the original register entry referring to the documents forwarded. These entries may be in pencil for convenience of subsequent erasure.

48. Index-books to all office registers, and letter, minute, and report books, shall be kept posted to date and each registered document should be entered therein alphabetically under the name or official title of the writer of the letter or minute received, or of the person to whom the letter or minute is sent. The registered number of each document and its subject are to be given in separate columns."

This system is almost identical with that prescribed for Western Australia in 1884 and similar to that employed in British New

3. These and subsequent details of indexing have been taken from the 1909 Instructions which, in these matters at least, are very similar in character to those issued in 1912. The Instructions of 1887, on the other hand, are more concerned with the transmission and classification of correspondence. This system however is said to be very similar to that prevailing in Western Australia (Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C., C.S.O. General Correspondence, 87/1489. Colonial Secretary to Governor, 8 July 1887) and since the 1909 Fijian Instructions concerning the control and transmission of correspondence closely resemble those issued earlier in Western Australia, it may be presumed that arrangements for the registration and indexing of correspondence promulgated in 1909 resemble practices which had prevailed in Fiji since 1887.

4. See above, Part II, Chapter 1, pp. 69-70.
Guinea 5. before the first World War and in the Leeward Islands during the same period. Like its counterpart in Western Australia, the Fijian system has many characteristics of the nineteenth century, particularly in the attention given to the whereabouts of individual papers and the use of chronological registration of all papers as the basis of control.

Interestingly enough, the system seems to have developed in the same way as many another, under the stress of daily operation and (no doubt) a growing volume of business. In 1912, the Governor 7. wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

"4. During the last fortnight I have experienced considerable difficulty in finding my way through the bundles of papers that have been submitted to me, and, had it not been for your very clear minutes, I should have been lost in the labyrinth of correspondence.

5. In many of the bundles of papers that have come before me I have noticed letters, and even telegrams from the Secretary of State, unregistered, and it is practically impossible without reading through the whole of the correspondence to find the answers to letters and despatches."

5. See some files of papers in C.A.O. G.P. 1 ( Colony ), Series 18.

6. Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C. C.S.O. General Correspondence, 12/4878. Governor to Colonial Secretary, 8 August 1912. Also, Regulations for the guidance of public officers in the conduct of their official work and correspondence (Antigua, 1906) contained in that file.


8. Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C. C.S.O. General Correspondence, 12/4878. Governor to Colonial Secretary, 8 August 1912.
The Instructions, as they stood, provided for not only the registration of individual papers, but also (as a second step) for the bringing together of related papers within the same jacket or set of jackets. "Every letter received shall, after registration, be placed in a Jacket..." "All documents directly relating to the subject of a jacketed communication should be enclosed in the Jacket with such communication." 9. The 1909 Instructions elaborated these rules. "... If there has been no recent correspondence on the same subject dealt with in the letter, it shall be placed in a fresh jacket, otherwise it should be enclosed in the departmental jacket relating to the subject." "Documents relating to correspondence already jacketted, and in the receiving office, should on receipt, and after separate registry, be placed and forwarded with such correspondence, and not in a fresh minute paper. This will avoid the needless multiplication of minute papers." 10. Again, as with the practices followed in registration and indexing, these arrangements are similar not only to those in operation in Western Australia, British New Guinea and the Leeward Islands, but also to those adopted by a large number of departments in the other Australian colonies. In Fiji, as elsewhere, the existence of jackets devoted to a particular subject had led to the temptation to add related papers immediately to jackets without preliminary registration. A state of affairs had been reached in which files

9. Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C. C.S.O. General Correspondence, 87/1k89. Instructions for the use of the "Minute Paper" or Jacket Form (Suva, 1887) paras. 3 and 12.

10. Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C. C.S.O. General Correspondence, 12/4878. Regulations for the conduct of official business and correspondence (Suva, 1909) paras. 22 and 35.
of papers were being accumulated on the following pattern:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGISTERED PAPERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNREGISTERED PAPERS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

and from this point, it has often been a small step to register only one paper (the first) on each file, and thus, in effect to register only the file itself.

Fiji, however, temporarily arrested this development. In acknowledging the receipt of the regulations then in force, the Governor wrote to the Colonial Secretary in August 1912:

"2. They have, I see, been drafted on the lines of the Regulations which were in force in Mauritius twenty years ago. But since that date an important modification has been adopted in that Colony and in the three other Colonies in which I have since served. The modification to which I refer is the separate registration in a separate M.P. Minute Paper of every letter and despatch received in the Colonial Secretary's Office except letters which are only formal acknowledgements, and of every telegram. Such letters, despatches, and telegrams are on their receipt placed at once in a separate M.P. (jacket) and are given by the Registration Clerk a new registered number, when the paper is placed on the top of the previous papers and is sent in to the Colonial Secretary or the Asst. Colonial Secretaries to be minuted.

3. The above system is in force in the Colonial Office, where it has stood the test of very many years use, and it was introduced by me with great success into the five Presidencies of the Colony of the Leeward Islands, with the result that official correspondence was rendered more simple and more intelligible in its methods.

These remarks, taken in conjunction with draft alterations made to the first part of paragraph 32 and to paragraph 35 of the 1909

11. Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C. C.S.O. General Correspondence, 12/4878. Governor to Colonial Secretary, 8 August 1912."
Instructions make it quite clear that documents received which related to the subject of a communication already jacketed, were, after separate registration, to be enclosed in a separate jacket, the whole set of jackets being submitted to officers as occasion required. The result of these arrangements would be to reduce the size of the contents of files or jackets and, by insisting on the need to create new jackets, restore the practice of registering individual papers.

12. For both original text and draft alterations see the copy of the Regulations for the conduct of official business and correspondence (Suva, 1909) on file C.S.C. General Correspondence, 12/4878. Archives of Fiji and the W.P.H.C.
APPENDIX D

AN INQUIRY INTO THE REGISTRY METHODS USED BY H.M. TREASURY.

Shortly after the end of the first World War, the organisation of the registry of the United Kingdom Treasury was brought under review. The scope of the inquiry was extensive and much of it, particularly those parts dealing with the structure of the registry in relation to that of the department and the methods used to control the transmission of papers, lie outside the purpose of this Appendix. But the description of the methods of registration and classification then in use and the discussion of the need for some measure of reform in these practices have a particular interest in view of developments which were also taking place in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand.

The receipt and preparation of papers fell into three stages. Firstly, incoming letters were directed to Docketing Clerks. Where previous correspondence was not required, letters were docketed and jacketed by these clerks and passed to Posting Clerks. Where earlier

1. This Appendix is based on notes taken by Mr. I. Maclean, Chief Archivist of the Commonwealth Archives Office, during an examination of the record-systems used by Treasury since the middle of the seventeenth century. The consultation of more modern material was subject to certain restrictions and an embargo on the quoting of personal names and file numbers has been observed here.

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correspondence was required, pencil notes on the subject-matter etc. were supplied before the newly arrived papers were sent to the Posting Clerks.

In the Posting section, letters were stamped with registration numbers and certain details were entered in a register. This was merely a list of numbers, with columns for a short description of the correspondent, assignment and notes of final action. All letters were indexed under the name of the correspondent or department, one index being devoted to personal names and another to those of departments. Letters were entered chronologically, no attempt being made to classify them by subject-matter.

Finally, letters not requiring previous papers were sent straight from the Posting section to Divisional officers. Those requiring earlier correspondence went to the Paper Room. Here, with the aid of a subject and precedents index, earlier papers were discovered, bundled with the new papers, and despatched to the Divisional officers. On completion of action, papers were returned to the Paper Room, where the questions at issue and decisions taken were noted in the subject and precedents index.

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of these arrangements is the attention given to individual papers. Each paper received was registered separately and each was placed in its own jacket, there to be joined by other papers (chiefly minutes and the letter sent in reply) to which it gave rise. If more than one jacket related to
a particular piece of business being currently conducted by the
department, the relevant jackets would be bundled together, but each
retained its individual identity. This, apparently, was the chief
point of weakness, since there was no certainty that all the related
jackets would be gathered up. It was now proposed that this system
should be altered and the element of uncertainty removed. Instead
of "one letter, one jacket", there should be "one subject, one
jacket", regardless of however many exchanges of letters might take
place in the course of a particular transaction. Moreover, only the
jacket was to be registered and papers would be identified in terms
of the jacket to which they belonged.

The principal motive behind this reform, then, was one of trying
to ensure that all papers relating to a particular subject were
permanently and expeditiously brought together. In this respect,
the emphasis is different from that which prompted many of the reforms
in Australian registry practices. In Australia, the notion that the
jacket should contain only one inward letter and the other papers to
which it gave rise, and thus create what was known as a docket, was
less rigidly adhered to. Colonial departments were bringing together
related dockets in a way which would have been unthinkable in the
Treasury or (so it seems) in the Colonial Office.2 Before the end
of the last century the practice of registering only selected papers
within each of these larger agglomerations had already developed, and
the extension of this practice has led to the registration of only the

2. See above, Appendix C, p.345.272
first paper or, in effect, of the file itself. As a corollary, the arrangement of papers within the file has been freed progressively from the restrictions imposed by registration, and fewer files (unfortunately) now resemble a series of dockets strung together. The Treasury, on the other hand, introduced both measures of reform simultaneously, abandoning the separate registration of papers as well as the use of an individual jacket for each. Both here and in the Australian departments, of course, the result has been much the same. Registration has been replaced by subject-matter as the means of controlling all but the smallest number of departmental papers, bringing with it the threat of all the perils to which such a step may lead. The crux of the method, as was pointed out in the Treasury at the time and has been found to be the case elsewhere, is the definition of subject. If this is not done plainly or narrowly, the result will be to create bulky files whose scope is uncertain and whose contents will in time require dissection either permanently or temporarily. Moreover, under these circumstances the whereabouts of individual papers can all too easily become a matter for conjecture.

The evidence of this inquiry, though interesting in itself, gains in significance if it is taken in conjunction with the material contained in the other Appendices. Together, they suggest that changes in the methods of classifying and controlling departmental correspondence were taking place contemporaneously in a number of separate but related quarters. The details of the changes are shadowy and inconclusive at present. But viewed from Australia, they hint not only at the existence of a wider and more profitable
field of inquiry into the methods of record-keeping followed by governments within the British sphere of influence, but also at the existence of much common ground in the matter of archive administration. Such an inquiry might well result in an important addition to the professional equipment of archivists in many parts of the Commonwealth and a source of enlightenment for a large body of the student public.
The scope of this bibliography is confined to sources consulted in the preparation of the thesis.

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

The following records of the Commonwealth and State Governments were examined for two different purposes, (i) for documentary evidence (indicated by * ) and (ii) for examples of record-keeping systems in operation (indicated by # ). In the latter case, it may be assumed that related records of control (e.g. indexes, registers, blank-cover books etc.) were also taken into account.

COMMONWEALTH

*(1st.) Department of External Affairs:
  General Correspondence, 1901.
  General Correspondence, 1901-2.
  Correspondence, 'A' series, 1902.

(1st.) Department of Home Affairs:
  Correspondence, 'F.C.' series, 1912-1916.
  Correspondence, 'F.C.W.' series, 1912-1916.

Department of Home and Territories:
  General Correspondence, 1916-1920.
  Correspondence, 'F.C.' series, 1917-1924.
  Correspondence, 'D.S.L.' series, 1917-1922.
  Correspondence, 'F.C.W.' series, 1917.

Department of Works and Railways:

Commonwealth Public Service Board:
  General Correspondence, 1903-1948.
  Correspondence, 'A' series, 1925-1948.
  Correspondence, 'B' series, 1925-1948.
  Correspondence, 'F' series, 1924.

Federal Capital Commission:
  Organisation circular, 1929.

Commonwealth National Library - Archives Division:
  Correspondence, 'R.A.' series, 1951-1954.
  Correspondence, 'R.F.' series, 1951-1954.
All the principal series of correspondence maintained by Commonwealth departments between 1901 and 1939 were examined, with the exception of those created by the Departments of Defence and Navy and the Postmaster General's Department. Of the series considered, those of three departments may be singled out as particularly interesting examples of record-keeping systems:

- External Affairs, 1901 - 1902.
- Treasury, 1901 - 1918.
- Works and Railways, 1917 - 1928.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Chief Secretary's Department:
- General Correspondence, 1883 - 1904.

Treasury:
- Correspondence (Miscellaneous series) 1890 - 1895.
- Correspondence (Public Officers series) 1890 - 1895.

New South Wales Public Service Board:
- General Correspondence, 1895 - 1900.
- General Correspondence, 1904 - 1907.
- General Correspondence, 1921 - 1936.

Lands Department:
- General Correspondence, 1856 - 1860.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

A. PROCEEDINGS AND PAPERS OF PARLIAMENT

Except where otherwise indicated, the page numbers quoted in footnotes drawn from these publications are the page numbers of the paper itself, not those of the volume in which the paper is bound. This practice has been adopted because for the greater part of the last century the volumes of one series (Victoria) lack any form of continuous pagination, while in others the pagination is sometimes defective. Code numbers of papers are not supplied as a rule, since these numbers are apparently rarely cited as a means of identification and (with the exception of South Australia and New Zealand) do not appear to have governed the order in which papers were bound. In the case of South Australia and New Zealand papers the number has been supplied, since it offers a convenient means of discovering the paper required.
A. PROCEEDINGS AND PAPERS OF PARLIAMENT (cont.)

The following series have been searched entirely:

COMMONWEALTH

Parliamentary Papers, 1903 - 1954-55.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 1855.
Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, 1856-7 - 1903.
Parliamentary Papers, 1904 - 1954.

QUEENSLAND

Parliamentary Papers, 1902 - 1953-54.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Papers, 1855-56 - 1900.

TASMANIA

Legislative Council of Van Diemen's Land: Votes and Proceedings and Papers, 1855.
Journals of the House of Assembly, 1856 - 1883.
Journals of the Legislative Council, 1856 - 1883.

VICTORIA

Papers presented to Parliament, 1856-57 - 1928.
A. PROCEEDINGS AND PAPERS OF PARLIAMENT (cont.)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 1874 - 1889.

NEW ZEALAND

Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1901 - 1920.

Of these, the papers which follow have been found particularly useful:

COMMONWEALTH

Parliamentary Papers


1920-1, Vol.IV Reports of the Royal Commission appointed to consider and report upon the Public Expenditure of the Commonwealth of Australia with a view to effecting economies.


NEW SOUTH WALES

Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council

1855, Vol.II Report from the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Surveyor-General's Department.
A. PROCEEDINGS AND PAPERS OF PARLIAMENT (cont.)

NEW SOUTH WALES

Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council


Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly

1858-59, Vol.II The Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix, of the Select Committee on the Management of the Survey Department.


Parliamentary Papers


QUEENSLAND

Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly

1860, Vol.I Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on Government Departments.
A. PROCEEDINGS AND PAPERS OF PARLIAMENT (cont.)

QUEENSLAND

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B. NEWSPAPERS

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PRECIS

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Presented by

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For over sixty years, Australian historical records have been objects of some interest. Seen at first as little more than a quarry for the discovery of interesting and diverting memorials of the past, by 1939 only a very small proportion had been brought under the care of the various state libraries. Although one of these made comparatively substantial provision for the reception of such material, both the scale and nature of the problems which were waiting to be solved still went unrecognised. The poverty of this inheritance in the field of archive administration has become steadily more apparent in the years since the end of the second World War when, as a result of a new administrative interest in the well-being of departmental records, thousands of feet of material have been moved from departments to new or existing places of deposit. Issues which had been ignored or overlooked for half a century now presented themselves squarely for consideration: how are archives classified and described? At this point, so it seemed, the picture became confusion, one in which the precepts laid down in the various manuals of instruction seemed hardly to apply. To many present at Canberra in 1954 it appeared that administrative circumstances in Australia had created a body of archives whose
structure and character were such as to require novel methods of administration.

In many ways such a suspicion was understandable. The present generation of government archivists in Australia had inherited no useful experience from their predecessors, had had difficulty in identifying their own predicament with the problems discussed in the manuals and had been denied the time to acquire experience of their own. They were suddenly confronted by the need to cope with a large volume of records which had been accumulating for between fifty and a hundred years. During that time not only had the methods of classifying and controlling records changed considerably, but the structure of the records had also undergone formidable modification in response to changes in the organisation of executive government. Consequently archives which were received in repositories presented signs of apparent confusion. Some series were incomplete, or could be attributed to more than one department, or contained records of different administrative associations. Some were accompanied by records of control which related to one series or perhaps two or three series, to part of one series or parts of two or three. Some occasionally referred to series long since submerged in others. These circumstances, it seemed, made it questionable whether an attempt to classify the archives in series and groups of series by reference to the administrative organisation which created them could succeed.

In fact, the processes by which this situation had come about
are well known to archivists elsewhere. The traditional principles of archive administration take their present shape precisely because of a desire to demonstrate the constant expansion and fragmentation of records created by the operations of executive government. In this respect there is neither more nor less difficulty in classifying modern departmental archives by reference to their administrative origins than there is in dealing with their mediaeval counterparts, because the forces which influence their accumulation are the same. Whatever the period, the character of departmental records must be influenced individually and collectively by the methods used for their control, by the organisation of the instrumentality which they serve and by the structure of executive government within which the department or office has to function. It is the consequences of great variety in modern record-keeping methods, of increasingly elaborate organisation of modern government and of rapid changes in all three which produce whatever element of novelty the archivist now has to face. The problem is not one of classification but of explanation; how the history and principle characteristics of archives created by these circumstances can be adequately yet economically set out. This is the sphere in which new equipment has to be provided by the archivist and used by the student public.