

Business Records

at the

Australian National University

N. G. BUTLIN

With a foreword by Sir Keith Hancock

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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Business Records at the
Australian National University

N. G. BUTLIN

Professor of Economic History

With a foreword by Sir Keith Hancock

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
CANBERRA



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Foreword

IN GREAT BRITAIN I have been associated with famous business enterprises, such as Unilevers and the Merseyside Docks, which have commissioned experienced academic people to write their histories – partly for reasons of political advantage, partly out of respect for the past and pride in their own achievements. I have also been associated for twenty years or more with the Council for the Preservation of Business Archives, which in co-operation with the business community has done so much to salvage and safeguard historical records of the highest national importance.

This work, which enjoys wide and enthusiastic support throughout Great Britain, is now advancing rapidly in Australia. In the following pages Professor Butlin gives a brief account of the collection that first he, and subsequently the Archives Committee of the Research School of Social Sciences with Mr B. D. Shields as Archives Officer, has built up in The Australian National University, and discusses how this collection and similar ones elsewhere may serve the interests and needs both of business men and historians. This project deserves the greatest support from the business community and from our academic colleagues in this and other universities.

W.K. Hancock.

UNIVERSITY FELLOW
(Former Director, Research School of Social Sciences)
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Foreword

I am very pleased to have been associated with the project which has resulted in this book. The project was initiated by the National Science Foundation, which has been very generous in its support. I have been very fortunate to have been associated with the project from the beginning to the end. The project has been a very successful one, and I am very proud of the results. The book is a very good one, and I hope it will be of great value to the reader.

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W.K. H. 1967

UNIVERSITY OF
(New South Wales)
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

A REPOSITORY FOR Australian Business Records, to be used in academic research work, has been established for some years at The Australian National University, Canberra.

This repository was built up originally as a by-product of current research work in Australian economic history, but contains basic information on a considerable range of research problems and now serves the needs of research workers in several disciplines including history, economics and political science. Subject to co-operation of business firms, it is intended that the collection of business records will continue to expand in order to preserve essential raw material for research by staff and post-graduate students.

Thanks to the generosity of the businessmen concerned, selected records of a considerable number of firms or organisations have been received into this repository over the years. Their names will be found in the Appendix at the end of this booklet.

The repository formed of these documents is not a library and is quite separate from the University Library. It is entirely specialised to business and other historical manuscripts and is directly under the supervision of the Archives Committee of the Research School of Social Sciences, made up of senior research staff of the University. The Archives Officer, with his staff of Assistants, is responsible to this Committee and under its broad policy directions collects, organizes and cares for the documents received.

The business records have been received on a number of conditions, the most important of which are:

- (a) Each company's documents are kept on shelves as a separate unit.
- (b) A full and detailed catalogue is made and returned to each firm.
- (c) Documents are accessible to officials of firms, on request.
- (d) Access to the repository is restricted to academic research workers.
- (e) All research manuscripts are submitted for review by firms from whose records information is drawn.

The material so far received is essentially of historical interest and extends over the years 1824 to 1962. Terminal dates vary as between firms. Records have been drawn from four States — Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia — and cover not only these States but also Western Australia, Northern Territory, Malaya, the Philippines, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

It is not intended in this brief notice to attempt a detailed indication of contents. The earliest document held is a request in 1824 by

the London Court of Directors of the Australian Agricultural Company to several members of the Macarthur family, asking them to serve on a local Committee to establish the Company in New South Wales. The original maps of explorers of northern New South Wales lie along with modern subdivisions of Newcastle and Melbourne or with maps and plans of pastoral stations extending from the Kimberleys through Katherine and Cunnamulla to Quirindi, Wagga, Seymour, Broken Hill and Mt Eba. The love letters of station managers, papers on construction of sheep washes, coal mining pay registers, minutes of conferences with miners from 1850 to 1940, financial records of steel pipe construction, bicycle racing in France, records of legal title to Circular Quay in the nineteenth century, minute books of companies, agencies and stations – all these give a hint of the wealth of information which can come from the dusty vaults of business firms.

The collection is designed primarily as a service to research workers in Australian universities rather than as a convenience for business firms. To this end it is intended that copies of the detailed catalogues will, in due course, be made available to all Australian university and public libraries. Since a high proportion of the material is in the form of loose letters and sketches, maps and technical specifications, photographs and memoranda, this cataloguing is necessarily a lengthy undertaking.

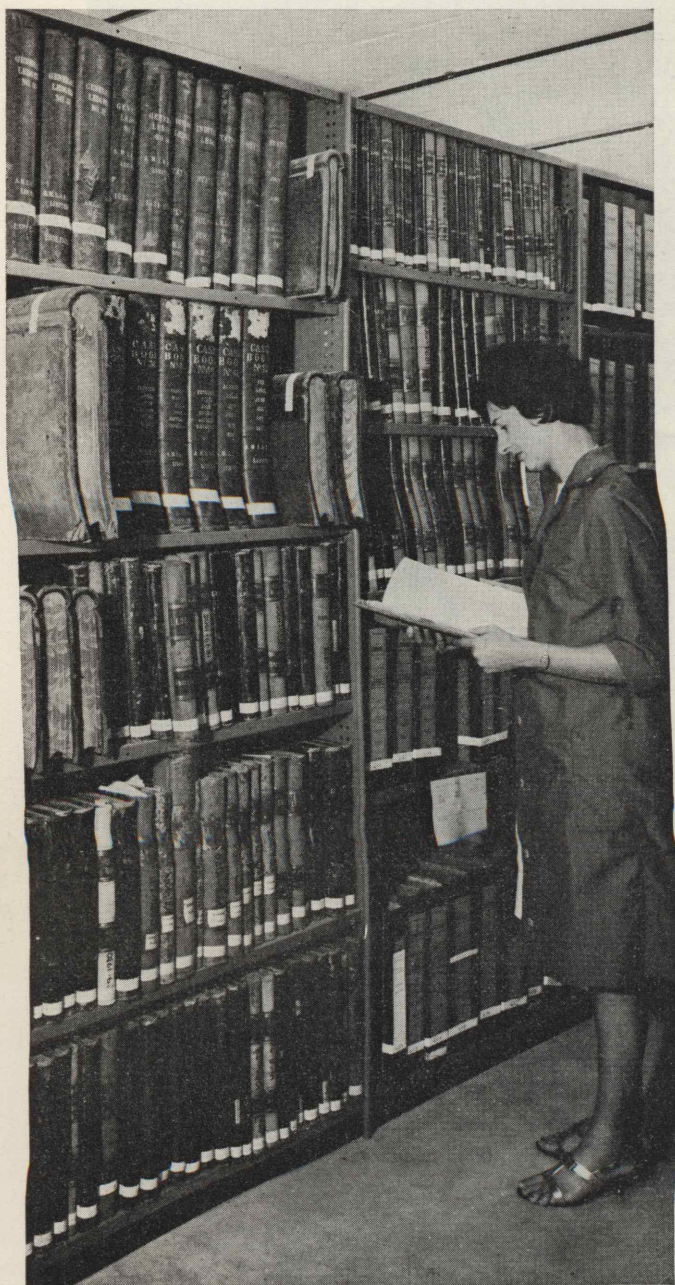
However, the advantages are not all one-sided. It can be convenient to firms to be able, if they wish, to pass old records into a secure repository to which access is controlled. But beyond this physical advantage, some firms are already finding that the results of academic research on these documents can be of value for actual business operations. A fruitful liaison between the business and academic communities can be established from this venture.

The Research Value of Business Records

Business Records can, most clearly, serve as the foundation for business histories. It would be unfortunate, however, if recent displays of interest by economic historians in Australian business records were to lead to undue concentration on that new historical fad, the business history. Certainly it is high time that much more attention was given to the lives of some of our leading business firms and businessmen, particularly in evaluating their role in our society. Most Australian business history has been of the glossy page variety. Notable exceptions



The Archives repository is located on the ground floor of the far wing of the H. C. Coombs Building, which houses the Research School of Social Sciences and the Research School of Pacific Studies.



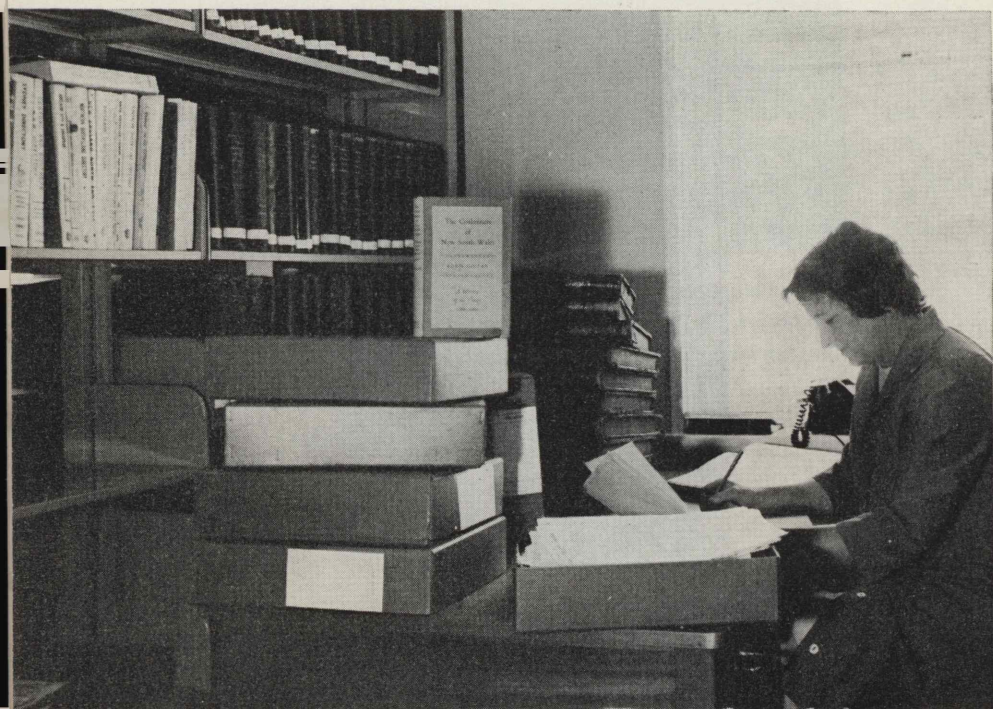
The repository is fire-proof, equipped with smoke detectors, and has a controlled air-flow. Only Archives staff may enter the repository itself, which is double-locked. The building is patrolled at night.



A detailed catalogue is prepared as soon as material is received, and a copy is sent to the owner. Here, the London records of the Australian Agricultural Company are being unpacked and sorted in preparation for listing.



A research service is provided for depositors who may require specific information from their own records. Here the Archivist makes notes from a ledger, in reply to a query.



Study facilities are provided on the spot for research workers. Arrangements can be made, under certain conditions, to send material or photocopies on loan to repositories elsewhere for the use of scholars unable to carry out their research in Canberra.

have been contained within Professor S. J. Butlin's *Foundations of the Australian Monetary System*, produced at Sydney University; and this has been followed by his study of the predecessors of the A.N.Z. Bank. From Melbourne University, Mr Blainey's *The Peaks of Lyell, Mines in the Spinifex*, and *Gold and Paper* have been valuable additions. At The Australian National University, Dr A. Barnard's *The Australian Wool Market* has been followed by *Visions and Profits, Studies in the Business Career of T. S. Mort*.

But the archives of business firms can enlighten a much wider range of study. No doubt the relevance of these records to the work of the economist and to the economic historian is easiest to see. The general historian has, perhaps, been unnecessarily slow to utilise the resources of business firms. One type of record, the least reliable or informative, has been used extensively – the newspaper. The rest has been left to the "economic" historian.

This has not been simply the fault of the historian. Many businessmen have been slow to realise the historical value of their records. One of the most distressing features of exploration into business records is the discovery that neglect in the past has permitted the destruction of historical records which are irreplaceable.

To treat business records merely as the source material of the history of the firm is to misunderstand the role of businessmen and of business firms in our society. Business records are primarily records of purchase and sale, and from this fact stems much of their interest to economists and economic historians. But the work of the businessman extends far beyond merely buying and selling; so his records cover a much wider range.

Perhaps few Australian businessmen have been quite as many-sided as Thomas Mort. It may be that not many companies have penetrated quite as deeply into the social, political, religious and economic life of Australia as did the Australian Agricultural Company. But just as Thomas Mort built a church at Bodalla and gave large sums to the Anglican Church, just as the Australian Agricultural Company hired school teachers and sacked bishops, so on a greater or smaller scale other business firms and their leaders have impinged on Australian society at many points. The B.H.P.'s role in technical education at Newcastle is a casual example of a modern influence which has its local counterpart in the activities of the small town shopkeeper in local government.

In the past, Australian historians have been severely handicapped

in writing social history by the limited information on technical, personal and financial records of pastoral stations. In view of the outstanding role played by finance and wool broking firms – Elder, Smith & Company, Goldsbrough, Mort & Company, Dalgety's, Australian Estates Ltd, Australian Mercantile, Land & Finance Company, and many others – it would be surprising if the social historian failed to find invaluable information among the dealings of these firms. A social historian of another bent can be rewarded handsomely from the sporting archives of Dunlop Rubber (Australia) Ltd. No political historian of Tasmania can afford to disregard the Van Diemen's Land Company. The fact that Humes Ltd, thanks to that ingenious inventor, W. R. Hume, was so closely concerned with Asian projects in the nineteen-thirties, opens up a new source of light on South-East Asia before the 1939-45 war. Historians of the Australian labour movement cannot afford to disregard the activities of the Silverton Tramway Company, the views of the mine managers of the Newcastle Coal Mining Company or the lending policy of the Modern Permanent Building Society.

As data on internal activities of the firm, business records deal with four main issues – technology, business administration, commercial law and finance. At The Australian National University, Dr Hall's *Australian Company Finance* was the first substantial attempt to utilise balance sheet data to study the sources of funds of Australian companies. The other issues are still virtually untouched. Hitherto, only the most formal studies of commercial law have been possible; serious study would necessarily depend on the co-operation of business firms. Business administration, from budget control to personnel management, is just beginning to attract some of the attention which has so far been concentrated on government departments.

But records of sale are also records of purchases: in recording their own acts business firms have, therefore, recorded the acts of customers and clients. Often this recording opens up opportunities for special research in aggregate form, based on statistical and literary evidence. The studies of Australian capital formation at The Australian National University have depended heavily on the aggregation of data obtained through the goodwill of many firms, as can be clearly seen in N. G. Butlin's *Investment in Australian Economic Development 1861-1900*, and *Australian Domestic Product, Investment and Foreign Borrowing 1861-1938/39*. Beyond the interests of economists and economic historians, other research tasks in this field clearly exist. Records of

labour turnover from business firms can be informative on labour mobility. Mortgage lending by building societies can tell us a great deal about the prevalence of and trends in home ownership. Sales of golf or tennis balls can be instructive in evaluating social behaviour.

Future Collection

Collections similar to that established at The Australian National University have been formed in other universities. Recent organised activity has done a good deal to bring academics and businessmen into contact and to open up a great deal of valuable material for academic research. In Sydney, the N.S.W. Business Archives Council has been active in the publication of a journal and in surveying material in business premises. In Melbourne there is the Victorian Business Archives Council. On the side of business, some firms have developed a friendly and interested co-operation in the work of The Australian National University. Merely to cite examples, we have to thank Goldsbrough, Mort & Company for requesting further records from shareholders in their Annual Report; the Australian Mercantile, Land & Finance Company went to considerable trouble in approaching the owners of some important collections; and both A.M.L. & F. and the Australian Agricultural Company have transferred a substantial part of their London office records to The Australian National University.

In this work one problem inevitably crops up. At some point research workers will be confronted with documents relating to named individuals or of interest to competitors of firms. This creates a major problem for many businesses, especially for finance and agency firms whose activities depend on relationships of trust and confidence with clients. But the question crops up somewhere with all firms. There is no solution to the problem short of the firm being satisfied with the discretion of the research worker. Experience at The Australian National University has been that this satisfaction can be given without detriment to the research worker. There is no reason why firms should, on this account, feel pessimistic about the possibility of making records available to academic workers.

The existing collection has merely scratched the surface. The immediate problem is to try to save as much as possible of what remains and to preserve irreplaceable historical records from the inroads of mildew and furnaces. The gaps which appear to exist are already serious. It will be exceedingly difficult, for example, to tell

from Australian records the story of the establishment of the automobile industry in Australia; few records seem to have survived on the Australian wholesale importing business; only scraps of information seem to exist on industry before the 1914-18 war.

This undertaking is not an unmanageable one, though it is a large one. If the universities are to sustain their claims to being centres of learning, they must themselves be prepared to contribute substantial sums to provide raw material for research by staff and students. But the challenge is not only for the academics; it is for the businessman too. Help from the business community can come, and is necessary, in several ways. Financial assistance may be needed, though the sums involved are not large even in the establishment and care of a large collection. Physical aid may be more important. The existing collection at The Australian National University has been established as a laborious research by-product. If firms can help by directly offering material, the process of preservation can be greatly speeded up and simplified. Interest of businessmen in this work is quickening. It is to be hoped that a friendly and interested co-operation can grow, to yield to the Australian universities the rich dividends which are undoubtedly to be gained.

Appendix

Records of the following business organisations* are in the Archives as at March 1966.

Pastoral

- 1 Alroy Downs Station (J. C. H. Schmidt)
- 2 Australasian Agency & Banking Corporation
- 3 Australian Agricultural Company
- 4 Australian Estates Ltd
- 5 Australian Mercantile Land & Finance Company Ltd
- 6 The Bodalla Company
- 7 Cavan Station (W. Castle-Roche)
- 8 Central Queensland Meat Export Co. Ltd
- 9 The Coreena Company
- 10 The Corona Pastoral Company
- 11 Elder Smith & Company Ltd
- 12 Fort Bourke Station
- 13 Goldsbrough Mort & Company Ltd
- 14 Jandra Station (Mrs M. Robertson)
- 15 Kallara Station (Berawinnia Pastoral Co.)
- 16 The Merchants' Trust Co. Ltd
- 17 Northern Territory Pastoral Company
- 18 Paroo Pastoral Company
- 19 Pearson, Rowe & Smith
- 20 Pitt, Son & Badgery Ltd
- 21 Rockhampton Downs Pastoral Company
- 22 Squatting Investment Co. Ltd
- 23 T. Beaumont & Sons
- 24 T. S. Mort Executors
- 25 Ularunda Station (Scottish Australian Co. Ltd)
- 26 Urangeline Station
- 27 Victoria River Downs Station

Financial

- 28 A. B. Pursell & Company
- 29 Clark & Company
- 30 County Building & Investment Company Ltd
- 31 County of Bourke Permanent Building & Investment Society
- 32 Freehold Assets Realisation Company
- 33 Freehold Banking Company
- 34 Greenmount Syndicate
- 35 Griffith Co-operative Building Society Ltd
- 36 Haymarket Permanent Land, Building & Investment Co. Ltd
- 37 Intercolonial Investment, Land & Building Co. Ltd
- 38 Land Mortgage Bank of Victoria
- 39 The Melbourne Trust Company
- 40 The Modern Permanent Building Society
- 41 Newcastle Building & Investment Company

* There is also a substantial collection of trade union and other employee organisations' records, as well as microfilm and ancillary material.



- 42 B. J. Ball & Co. Ltd (Paper)
 43 Paterson, Laing & Bruce Ltd (Softgoods, etc.)
 44 Griffiths Bros. Pty Ltd (Tea)
 45 Leviathan Ltd (Clothing)
 46 McEwans Ltd (Hardware)
 47 H. B. Selby & Co. Pty Ltd (Precision instruments)
 48 H. Saltau & Sons (Farm produce)
 49 Rosenstamm Pty Ltd (Grindery, etc.)
 50 Makower McBeath & Co. Pty Ltd (Silk, textiles)
 51 Marcus Clark & Co. Ltd (General retailers)

Legal and Accounting

- 52 Clarke & Barwood (Colac, Victoria)
 53 David Fell & Co.

Manufacturers and Traders

- 54 Allen Taylor & Co. Ltd (Timber)
 55 Australian Coking & Bi-Products Ltd
 56 Bedggood & Co. Pty Ltd (Shoes)
 57 Bowen & Pomeroy Pty Ltd (Timber)
 58 David Bros Pty Ltd (Engineers)
 59 Dunlop Rubber (Australia) Ltd
 60 Humes Ltd; incl. subsidiaries
 61 Johns & Waygood Ltd (Engineers)
 62 John Danks & Son Pty Ltd (Builders & plumbers supplies)
 63 John McIlwraith Industries Ltd (Builders & plumbers supplies)
 64 Laycock, Son & Co. Pty Ltd (Woollen spinners)
 65 Lincoln Mills (Australia) Ltd (Woollen spinners)
 66 Michaelis Hallenstein & Co. Pty Ltd (Tanners, grindery merchants)
 67 Mitchell & Co. Pty Ltd (Farm machinery)
 68 Mort's Dock & Engineering Co. Ltd
 69 Nugget Pty Ltd (Boot polish)
 70 Paddle Bros. Pty Ltd (Shoes)
 71 T. Brunton & Co. Pty Ltd (Flour)
 72 W. G. Hart & Son (Blacksmiths)
 73 William Cooper & Nephew (Aust.) Pty Ltd (Sheep-dip)
 74 Wollongong Gaslight Co. Ltd

Transport

- 75 The Aberdare Railway
 76 James Paterson Pty Ltd

Mining

- 77 Lake George Mines Pty Ltd
 78 Newcastle Coal Mining Company
 79 Mt. Oxide Copper Mine
 80 Zig-Zag Colliery Ltd
 (plus The Australian Agricultural Company)

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- Robert Reid Pty. Ltd.
 - Paterson, Laing & Bruce Ltd. (Second deposit)
 - Sydney Meat Preserving Company
 - Griffith Producers' Co-operative Co. Ltd.
 - Beelbanger Vine Growers Co.-op- Society Ltd.
 - Paterson, Laing and Bruce Ltd. (Third deposit)
 - Victoria River Downs library
 - Goldsbrough Mort & Co.Ltd. (London Office)
 - Elder, Smith & Co. Ltd. (London Office)
 - Godfrey Hirst Pty. Ltd.
 - Mirrool Wineries Co-operative Ltd.
 - Coolegong Station
 - Clifton Estate
 - Trust & Agency Co. of A'sia Ltd.
 - British New Guinea Development Co. Ltd.(London Office)
 - Paterson, Laing & Bruce (London Office)
 - Australian Mercantile Land & Finance Co.Ltd. (London Office)
 - Goldsbrough, Mort & Co.Ltd. (Adelaide Office)
 - A.M.L. & F. Co. (Sydney Office)

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