



P R O V E N A N C E

The first years of the Victorian Archives

Provenance is the new journal of Public Record Office Victoria. *Provenance* presents research in the field of archives and records management, and provides an arena for scholarly debate and reflection. Drawing on the wealth of records within the Victorian state archives, the journal aims to promote archival research within Australia.

The first issue of *Provenance* was launched in April as part of the 2003 PROV 30th Anniversary celebrations. This second issue marks the centenary, in July 2003, of the first transfer of public records into archival custody in Victoria.



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By PROFESSOR EW (BILL) RUSSELL
Original archival research by CHARLIE FARRUGIA

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE VICTORIA

Provenance

The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria
Volume 1, Number 2, 2003
ISSN: 1448-1502

First published 2003 by
Public Record Office Victoria
in association with
Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd
PO Box 299, Kew, Vic 3101

Designed by: Green Poles Design

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Within this edition of *Provenance*, brief citations are included.
Readers wishing to view any of these records are invited to consult reference staff at the
Melbourne Archives Centre for further information.

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The first years

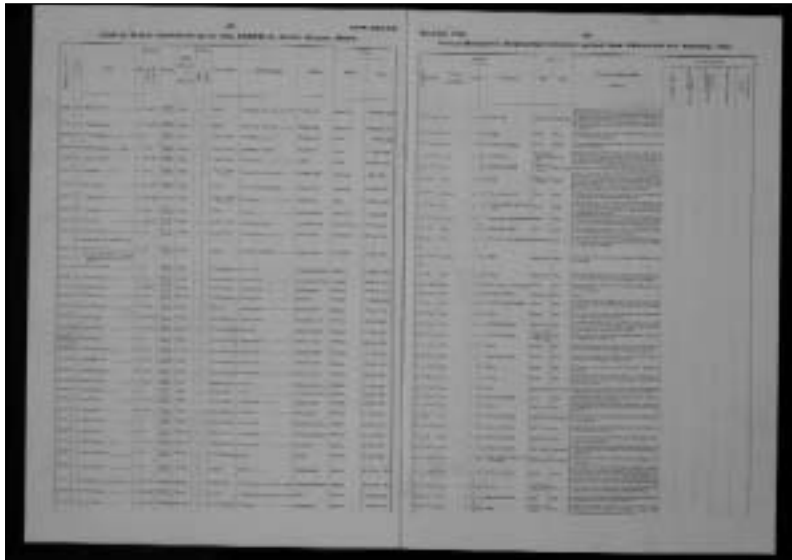
of the Victorian Archives

This is the second part of a two-part essay on the history of the Victorian State Archives.

The first part of the essay, which appeared in Volume 1, Number 1 of *Provenance*, put into context the fight for archival legislation, as part of the celebration of thirty years of the Victorian Public Records Act.

This second part celebrates the centenary of the collection, and focuses on the founders and the records they collected.

For reasons of continuity, there is some overlap between this and the previous part to ensure that vital aspects of the story are covered.



These pages are from the Convict Indents, the first public records transferred to the Public Library of Victoria from the Law Department in 1903. The Indents, which give amazingly detailed information about each convict transported to Sydney between 1830 and 1842, were used by the magistrates in Port Phillip to identify ex-convicts or escaped convicts brought before them.

PROV, VPRS 107/P0.

*I*n 1893, Mrs WR Cortis of Newtown, New South Wales, a descendant of Captain Foster Fyans, Commissioner of Crown Lands in Geelong in the 1840s, asked the Public Library of Victoria about the historical documents it held. She had heard that some old papers found in a secret drawer of Fyans' escritoire, which she had sold after his death in 1870, had subsequently been sent to the Library:

Some time after this sale there was accidentally discovered in this escritoire a secret drawer containing papers, [and] ... as some of these were considered to be of public interest they were handed to the authorities of your Museum for safe custody ... I shall be obliged if you will kindly send me a list of the papers thus found ... my friend ... saw a statement to the above all before 1884—say from 1880 ... in Geelong or Melbourne paper, supposed to be Geelong paper ...¹

Librarian Dr Francis Bride² replied that he could not state definitely whether the documents were in the Library. He could state, however, that in the previous thirteen years only nine documents of that kind had been acquired by the Library. These comprised: some letters of John Pascoe Fawkner; the journal of the 1837 expedition in search of a white woman among blacks in Gippsland; Batman's journal; the diary of Mollison's journey to Port Phillip in 1837; the two Batman deeds, some gold licences and miner's rights; the field book of surveyor John Helder Wedge; and the original plan of the first land sale in Melbourne in 1837.³

1 Cortis to Bride, January 1893, VPRS 805/P0, letter 73 of 1893.

2 Dr Thomas Francis Bride (1849–1927), Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria 1881–96.

3 Bride to Cortis, 18 June [actually April, misdated by Bride] 1893, Public Library of Victoria outwards letter book, letter no. 283, VPRS 802/P0.

In the nineteenth century, the Public Library did little to pursue Australian sources. Under Trustee President Sir Redmond Barry and Librarians Augustus Tulk⁴ and Henry Sheffield,⁵ the institution was what historian David McVilly has referred to as ‘very definitely a British Library’,⁶ whose deficient collection of Australian printed books was subject to much criticism.⁷

Edmund La Touche Armstrong,⁸ the fifth Chief Librarian, states in his reminiscences that before the appointment of Dr Francis Bride as Librarian in 1881, ‘it had been carried on in an easy, old-fashioned way, under two or three officers and a few attendants’.⁹ The novelist Marcus Clarke, Sub-Librarian under Barry’s presidency, captured the atmosphere of the Library in those times:

In the midst of the general silence, the sound of a quiet footstep is heard and a portly rubicund old gentleman walks sharply down the hall. This is Sir Harry Bedmont [ie Sir Redmond Barry], Judge of the Supreme Court, the patron of the library and its most liberal donor. He is a thorough gentleman of the old school, and though somewhat pompous, a benevolent, hospitable man and an excellent judge. Let us leave him to chat with Boffins the Librarian [Augustus Tulk] ... a little man who dabbles in literature, and pens weekly criticisms ... under the nom-de-plume of Oliver Oldworthy.¹⁰

‘Bedmont’ and ‘Boffins’ were literary men, classicists and bibliophiles for whom archives held little interest. When the Library acquired one of the Batman deeds in 1878, Barry dismissed it as being ‘of no intrinsic worth’.¹¹ However, following the death of Barry in November 1880, the retirement of Henry Sheffield and the appointment of Dr Bride as Librarian, the Library started to take some limited interest in Australian resources. In 1882, Bride reported to the Trustees that publications issuing from the Australian colonies would be ‘diligently collected and deposited in the Library’, and in 1883 he arranged for Victorian government publications to be distributed by the Library.¹²

4 Augustus Tulk (1810–73), Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria 1856–73.

5 Henry Sheffield, Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria 1873–81.

6 David McVilly, ‘A History of the State Library of Victoria 1853–1974’, MA thesis, Monash University, 1975, p. 49.

7 *ibid.*, pp. 48–9.

8 Edmund La Touche Armstrong (1864–1946), Chief Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria 1896–1925.

9 Edmund La Touche Armstrong, ‘Fifty Years of the Public Library: Some Recollections and Some Notes’, typescript, SLV M5584, p. 5.

10 Quoted in Brian Elliott, *Marcus Clarke* (1958), p. 259.

11 Report of the Trustees, 1879, p. 6, cited in McVilly, ‘A History ...’, p. 50.

12 McVilly, ‘A History ...’, pp. 72–3.

Nevertheless, progress came slowly. When asked about the Library's holdings of archives in 1903, Armstrong advised: 'I am sorry I can give no information on this matter. The Trustees have made special efforts to obtain and preserve historical documents relating to Australia and particularly to Victoria, but they have never had the custody of any government archives.'¹³

In the nineteenth century, public records in Victoria largely remained with the colonial government departments and bodies that had created them. By July 1903, however, the first transfer of public records to the Library took place, with ten volumes of Convict Indents¹⁴ being transferred by the Secretary of the Law Department. Armstrong himself made notes as to their administrative significance, and his handwritten comments are still bound into one of the volumes today.

WW Harris, the Clerk of Courts at Geelong, advised Armstrong in a note written early in August 1903: 'I am glad you got some of the indents. I wrote to Mr Slater, CPS [Clerk of Petty Sessions] Port Fairy but have not had any reply ... I will keep a note of the missing years 1832, 1835 in the event of my dropping across them.'¹⁵

Four years later, in September 1907, Harris, who had by then moved from Geelong to Sale, again wrote to Armstrong advising about old records: 'I have had enquiries made about the old records at Port Albert and find that the only books there are (1) Record of Prisoners received at Palmerston Gaol in 1864, and (2) coasters outward from 1845 giving the name of the ship. There were others but they were removed some time ago.'¹⁶

The ten volumes transferred in 1903 from the Law Department may be those reported by George Dunderdale, the Clerk of Courts at Alberton, as the ten or eleven 'removed to the Crown Law Offices' from Alberton Court House on 4 April 1884.¹⁷ In fact, eleven volumes were removed from Alberton to the Law Department at this time, although only ten were transferred to the Library in 1903. Another eleven volumes were transferred by the Law Department in 1928, of which six are held by Public Record Office Victoria. One of these may be the eleventh volume from

13 Public Library of Victoria inwards correspondence, 03/1061, VPRS 805/P0.

14 These now form units 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 15, 18, 22, 23 and 27 of VPRS 107/P0, all of which can be identified by the Public Library of Victoria stamp dated 31 July 1903 and accession numbers borne by eight of them, from 148852 to 148859, which confirm 1903 as the date of their transfer. The remaining two items bear Duplicate Stock nos 886 and 887.

15 Harris to Armstrong, Public Library of Victoria inwards correspondence, letter 03/802, VPRS 805/P0.

16 Harris to Armstrong, Public Library of Victoria inwards correspondence, 07/1360, VPRS 10276/P0.

17 George Dunderdale, Clerk of Courts, Palmerston, to the Acting Secretary to the Law Department, 26 May 1884, Alberton Courts outwards letter book, VPRS 285/P0.

Alberton. Perhaps appropriately for a port settlement, Alberton's records are shown as having been sent to Melbourne by the South Gippsland Shipping Company's schooner *Twins*.¹⁸

In 1883, there were still public records in Alberton dating back to 1844, when the region was administered by Crown Lands Commissioner Tyers, 'the king of Gippsland'. And by a remarkable chain of events, these early records became the first to be transferred by a department to the Public Library. Usefully in 1883, both the Police Magistrate and the Clerk of Courts at the tiny, derelict court in Alberton were men of letters. The Police Magistrate was Alfred William Howitt,¹⁹ a member of a notable family of writers. His father William²⁰ had visited Victoria in 1852 and produced several books including *Land, Labour and Gold*, *Letters on Transportation* and *The History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand*, while his uncle Richard had written *Impressions of Australia Felix* (1845), one of the earlier books on the Port Phillip settlement. His uncle Dr WG (Godfrey) Howitt, too, was a noted book collector.²¹ Alfred William Howitt himself achieved eminence in 1861 when he was sent in search of Burke and Wills, subsequently publishing his journal of that search. In 1863, he was appointed Police Magistrate at Omeo and remained in Gippsland in that role until 1889, when he was appointed Acting Secretary for Mines. In all, he wrote thirteen books, of which those on the Aborigines of south-eastern Australia, particularly his 819-page work *The Native Tribes of South Eastern Australia* (1904) and *Kamilaroi and Kurnai* (1880), were significant. Later he was to fill such key roles for the Victorian Government as Secretary for Mines, Public Service Commissioner and Commissioner of Audit.

Howitt's Clerk of Courts at Alberton, George Dunderdale,²² was also something of a man of letters. Two of his books have been reprinted in recent times: *Book of the Bush*, 'containing many truthful sketches of the early colonial life of squatters, whalers, convicts, diggers, and others', published in 1893 by Ward Lock and reissued by Penguin in 1975, and *Among the Diggers*, reprinted in Ballarat in 1999. His *Prairie and Bush*, published in London in 1891, although not reprinted, was an original attempt to compare frontier life in the United States and Australia.

18 Law Department, index to inwards registered correspondence for 1884, VPRS 252/P0, and register of inwards correspondence for 1884, VPRS 251/P0; see also *The Gippsland Standard*, 3 April 1884, p. 2.

19 Alfred William Howitt (1830–1908), CMG, explorer, public servant and writer. Secretary for Mines for Victoria 1889–95; Audit Commissioner and Public Service Board member 1895–1901. See *The Cyclopaedia of Victoria*, vol. 1, p. 457.

20 William Howitt (1792–1879), author.

21 Dr WG Howitt's book collection was auctioned in Melbourne on 17 March 1894.

22 George Dunderdale (1822–1903), Clerk of Courts and writer.



The remarkable public servant, explorer and anthropologist Alfred Howitt, whose actions in 1883 led to the saving of records from the tiny court house at Alberton, in Gippsland. These records became the first accessions of the respective archives collections of the Public Library of Victoria and the Historical Society of Victoria.

La Trobe Library Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Such was the two-man team in charge of justice for the tiny settlement of Alberton in 1883–84.

Late in 1883, Howitt advised the Law Department of his concerns regarding the dilapidated state of the Court House and the difficulty of storing the records:

Since my last visit I find that the roof has lost a number of shingles and that independently of the rain which falls through the holes caused thereby, numbers of swallows enter the building, which is now in such an extremely filthy state from their droppings that one room alone remains fit for use. Mr Dunderdale informs me that he has difficulty in finding a place in the buildings in which he can store the records and documents.²³

In April 1884, Dunderdale prepared a list of records and furniture in both Alberton and Tarraville court houses. Having been appointed Clerk of Courts at Tarraville, he wrote to the Acting Secretary of the Law Department indicating that, as to the

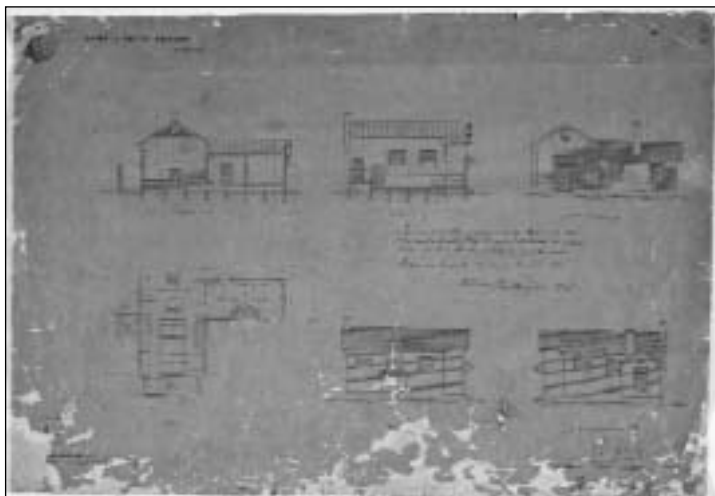
records ... which now encumber the floor of the Tarraville Court, it will be necessary to remove them as they would not be secure from damage and loss when the place is open to the public. The Court House at Alberton will be unfit to receive them until it has been covered with a new roof. The prisoners' room at Palmerston is the only place at present available, [and] I would suggest they all be placed in it.²⁴

Loose within the first volume of the Convict Indents is Dunderdale's listing of records. The section on records removed from the Alberton Court House mentions eleven volumes of Convict Indents, marked 'Removed to Crown Law Offices', two letter books, two Petty Sessions Record Books and various other items. The material listed as belonging to Tarraville Court House includes two Cause List Books, a Petty Sessions Register and a package of letters.²⁵

23 Howitt to Secretary of the Law Department, 17 December 1883, Alberton Courts outwards letter book, VPRS 285/P0.

24 Dunderdale to Secretary of the Law Department, 25 May 1884, VPRS 285/P0.

25 'List of Furniture, Books etc at the Court House at Tarraville', 4 April 1884, loose folio in VPRS 285/P0.



In this tiny court house in the Gippsland port settlement of Alberton, two men of letters, Alfred Howitt and George Dunderdale, were Magistrate and Clerk in 1883–84. When missing shingles led to swallows defiling the records of the court, Howitt and Dunderdale listed and protected the records, sending precious Convict Indents back to Melbourne by sailing ship for preservation.

PROV, VPRS 3686/P1.

At the Public Library, despite success in his search for the Convict Indents, Edmund Armstrong does not seem to have set great store by the acquisition of the first batch of them. When in 1906 he published *The Book of the Public Library*, a chronology that mentions important accessions in various years, the Convict Indents did not warrant mention.²⁶

Some forty years later, Ernest Pitt,²⁷ the seventh Chief Librarian, reflected on this period and Armstrong's attitude to archives in a handwritten note headed 'Archives in Library'. Pitt states:

Even as early as 1883 books that properly come under the name of Archives were acquired by the Trustees, for example, the office book of the Melbourne Agency of the Derwent Bank. Other similar works were acquired from time to time but no serious effort was made to establish an Archives Branch. To a great extent this was due to the fact that my predecessor of those days [i.e. Armstrong] favoured the establishment of a Public Record Office on the lines of the one in London as a separate government department rather than the institution of an archives branch in the library.²⁸

The eighty-one-year-old Armstrong, in his reminiscences in 1945, was clear about this:

The Library has obtained the custody of many state documents or public records, but no real attempt to establish a record office has yet been made ... Victoria has many public documents of importance but they are scattered in various departments. These should be carefully examined and any of sufficient importance should be preserved ... These documents will so increase, indeed have so increased, that the establishment of a Records Office has become essential. Whether that office should be connected with the Public Library is at least doubtful.²⁹

26 Edmund La Touche Armstrong, *The Book of the Public Library* (1906).

27 Ernest Roland Pitt (1877–1957), Chief Librarian 1931–43, co-author of the Munn–Pitt Report on Australian Libraries (1935), Chair of the Board of Inquiry into Library Services 1940–44. In a conservative period, Pitt proved to be a creative innovator and a useful advocate for reform.

28 Pitt, ms notes 'Archives in Library', c. 1940, papers separated from Public Library file 1943/228, VPRS 5716/P1.

29 Armstrong, 'Fifty Years of the Public Library ...', p. 13b.

HALL LIBRARY, MORGAN AND BATHURST, SYDNEY
 N.S.W.

name of
 bound indents

Name & description of all real
 & personal property which arrived
 in the colony of New South
 Wales. 1828, 1831, 1832 (2 copies)
 1834, 1836, 1837, 1838 (4 copies)
 1839

These indents were detailed
 amongst the papers of the
 Judge & under other papers
 during the transportation of goods

It is to be found in the
 name given that all these
 records should be destroyed.
 In a few cases however they
 are not done & the volume
 also referred to was obtained
 from the Secretary of the Law
 Department - July, 1903.
 E. La Touche

A handwritten note by the great Chief Librarian Edmund La Touche Armstrong, dated August 1903, on the provenance of the Convict Indents. The note is bound into the first volume, transferred in July 1903.

PROV, VPRS 107/P0.

The Convict Indents are printed records of convicts transported to New South Wales, and the context of their near destruction is given by Armstrong in his note dated August 1903 in the cover of the first volume. There he states that the Indents were distributed among ‘the governors of the gaols and certain other officials during the transportation epoch. At a later period instructions were given that all these records should be destroyed.’³⁰ It may be surmised that these comments reflected instructions from the Secretary of the Law Department, from whom the records were received. At that time, the Secretary was Mathew Byrne, an Irishman who had joined the department in 1859.³¹

The circumstances under which this series of records came to Victoria in the first place are disclosed in an 1837 file from the Police Magistrate’s Office, Port Phillip. In this file, dated 1 March, the Colonial Secretary in Sydney advised the Bench of Magistrates in Port Phillip:

I am directed by His Excellency the Governor to transmit for the use of your Bench the Accompanying Volumes of Printed Indents of Prisoners arrived in the Colony in the years 1830, 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834 & 1835; and to request that you will cause great care to be taken of them, so that they may be kept for reference.³²

Further volumes in this series were located and transferred from Geelong Police Station in 1918, after the Public Library was alerted to their precarious existence. Others again came from the Law Department in 1928, the Penal Department in 1935 and the Geelong Police Station in 1938. In all, this made a total of thirty volumes that now comprise the series. At first, these items were perhaps viewed by the Library as publications. However, since they were printed only in limited numbers for controlled circulation among government officials, they are clearly public records, and it is their transfer in 1903 to the Library that marks the real commencement of Victoria’s archival collection—albeit somewhat unintentionally, from the Library’s point of view.

The second important acquisition of government archives by the Public Library took place on 22 October 1909,³³ with the transfer of ten volumes of Duplicate Despatches that had been offered to the Victorian Government by the British Government. In April of that year, the British

30 The note is found in VPRS 107/P0.

31 *The Cyclopaedia of Victoria* (1903), vol. 1, p. 203.

32 Police Magistrate’s inwards correspondence 1837/14, VPRS 4/P0.

33 Now VPRS 1085/P0.

Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Crewe, advised Sir TD Gibson-Carmichael,³⁴ the Governor of Victoria, that His Majesty's Government had in mind the disposal of eleven volumes of Duplicate Despatches held in the Public Record Office, covering the period 1851–56. The Victorian Government was given six months to indicate whether it would like to be presented with these. In addition, an invitation was extended for a representative to be shown the documents.³⁵ The Agent-General for Victoria subsequently inspected them and ten of the volumes were forwarded to Melbourne. A second group of these records was transferred in 1912, including the eleventh volume from the first group apparently earlier overlooked by the Agent-General.

By this time, the transfer of Duplicate Despatches on an Australia-wide basis had the support of the Sydney-based Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. On 10 January 1911, at the Congress of the Association in Sydney, Professor GC Henderson, from the History Department at the University of Adelaide, had spoken in his Presidential Address, entitled 'Colonial Historical Research', of the 'paramount importance of original historical research'.³⁶ Using the strongest terms, he underlined the importance of the Duplicate Despatches: 'These despatches are to the body of material for purposes of research what the backbone is to the human frame. You cannot construct a history of permanent value without them.'³⁷ In the next few years, Henderson was to play a key role in the formation of the pioneer South Australian Archives.

Subsequently, the Association wrote to the governing bodies of the Public Libraries in all state capitals, requesting them to approach the Secretary of State for Colonies. Their objective would be to seek custody for their institutions of the duplicates of despatches between the governors of colonies and the Secretary of State for Colonies. The Public Library of Victoria (along with those of Western Australia and South Australia) acted on this request, writing on 14 March 1912 to ask that these records be transferred. The Secretary of State for Colonies advised the Agent-General on 17 May 1912 that the records would indeed be made available,³⁸ and a number of volumes—including the Duplicate Despatches for 1856, and some Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly Minutes—were sent back to Melbourne from London via the Agent-General. These were made available to the Public Library on 1 August 1912.³⁹

34 Sir Thomas Gibson-Carmichael, Governor of Victoria 1908–11.

35 Despatches from the Secretary of State, despatch no. 39 of 1909, VPRS 1087/P0.

36 AAAS Congress Proceedings 1911, p. 369.

37 *ibid.*, p. 371.

38 Despatches from the Secretary of State, despatch no. 61 of 1912, VPRS 1087/P1.

39 Public Library of Victoria inwards correspondence 12/944, VPRS 10276/P0.

Meanwhile, in 1909 the Historical Society of Victoria came into being and started to campaign for the preservation of early official documents. The catalyst was an article entitled 'Vanishing Records' by WJ Hughston, published on 20 March 1909 in *The Argus*. The article suggested that a league be formed for collecting and recording the experiences of the early colonists. The idea appealed to Alfred Greig, who wrote to Hughston requesting a meeting. Hughston's reply, from his home at 157 Victoria Road, Upper Hawthorn, survives in the Society's archives. In it, Hughston wrote: 'Your suggestions are excellent. I should very much like to meet you. If you could arrange to see me in town ... we might talk over the subject of an Historical Society more fully.'⁴⁰ Greig arranged to meet Hughston on 7 April 1909 under the portico of the Public Library. According to Greig's diary of these events, also archived at the Society, he then 'took [Hughston] to the Exhibition Building, where we had a conference with Mr EA Petherick on the subject'.⁴¹

Greig, the son of the Superintendent of the Melbourne Immigrants' Home, was a man of boundless energy and enthusiasm. He took meticulous notes of every step made towards founding the Society, including the numbers of stamps, details of the many letters and circulars sent out and the equally substantial correspondence received from people in city and country who were consulted about it. Armstrong notes that Greig had been on the staff of the Public Library 'for a brief period',⁴² later becoming Registrar of the University of Melbourne. Greig was also an avid local historian, a contributor to the *Victorian Historical Magazine*, an office holder of the Society for many years, and author or co-author of notable historical works, particularly *Victoria: A Centenary History* (1934).⁴³

Petherick's collection of Australiana was then temporarily housed at the Exhibition Buildings.⁴⁴ Greig actively pursued the idea of a Historical Society during April, meeting various people to discuss it, including Armstrong and Morris Miller at the Public Library on 21 April. On 14 May 1909, Greig issued a circular which stated that 'an endeavour is being made to establish a Society, having as its principal object the collection and preservation of reminiscences of old Colonists, and all other information connected with the early history of Victoria'.⁴⁵ The Society

40 Hughston to Greig, 2 April 1909, letter book 618, RHSV.

41 Greig diary 1909, in minute book, RHSV.

42 Armstrong, 'Fifty Years of the Public Library ...', p. 5.

43 Obituary, AW Greig, *Victorian Historical Magazine*, June 1944, no. 3, pp. 102-3 and elsewhere.

44 Speech at Wangaratta, by Dudley Shephard, *RHSV Newsletter*, June 1954, file on foundation of Society, RHSV.

45 AW Greig, circular letter, 14 May 1909, RHSV.



The portico of the Public Library of Victoria, under which Alfred Greig and WJ Hughston had their first meeting, on 7 April 1909. This meeting led to the formation of the Historical Society of Victoria. For many years, the Library and the Society worked closely together in advocating a State Records Office and preserving historic records.

Photograph by Jo Bradley.

came into being on Friday, 21 May 1909, following a public meeting at Furlong's Music Studio, Royal Arcade, chaired by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon. (later Sir) Frank Madden.⁴⁶ The Society's first Chairman was Professor Harrison Moore,⁴⁷ Dean of the Law School of the University of Melbourne, with Henry Gyles Turner⁴⁸ and Alfred Deakin⁴⁹ as Vice-Presidents, and Alfred Greig as Secretary.⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that a connection with the History School of the University was almost formed here, due to the Society's accommodation requirements, for Hughston wrote to Greig on 15 April 1909: 'I have already secured a room, that of Miss Webb, in the Block Arcade. She is the Lecturer in History at the University of Melbourne.'⁵¹ This is a reference to Jessie Webb, a part-time lecturer in Ancient History at the University since 1909, who was finally appointed full-time in 1921, occasionally acting as Professor.⁵²

The preservation of official records was not one of the aims included in the founding resolution of the Society, as moved by Henry Gyles Turner. Nor was it included in an ambitious list of projects published by the Society in 1909 in the *Education Gazette and Teachers Aid* through the auspices of Charles Long. Nevertheless, while announced projects ranged from collecting reminiscences, letters, diaries, drawings, prints and postage stamps, to the study of the Aboriginal tribes of Victoria,⁵³ one of the first issues actually pursued by the Society was the preservation of official records.

The matter seems first to have been raised by Professor Ernest Scott, on 21 April 1910, at a meeting of the Society presided by Professor Harrison Moore:

46 Sir Frank Madden (1847–1921), MLA 1894–1917 and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly 1904–17.

47 Sir W Harrison Moore (1867–1935), Professor of Law at the University of Melbourne.

48 Henry Gyles Turner, author of *History of the Colony of Victoria* (2 vols, 1904). Turner spent most of his life as a banker in Victoria, rising to General Manager of the Commercial Bank of Australia. But he had originally, in the late 1840s, been apprenticed to the eminent London bookseller and publisher William Pickering, of the Aldine Press. See Phillip Menzell, *Australasian Dictionary of Biography* (1892), pp. 474–5.

49 Alfred Deakin commenced his second term as Prime Minister of Australia less than a fortnight later, on 2 June 1909.

50 Obituary, AW Greig, *Victorian Historical Magazine*, June 1944, no. 3, pp. 102–3.

51 Hughston to Greig, 15 April 1909, letter book 618, RHSV.

52 Acting Professor Jessie Stobo Watson Webb (d. 1944), appointed Lecturer in History at the University of Melbourne in 1908, was one of the founders of the Lyceum Club and Australia's alternate delegate to the League of Nations in 1923. Obituary by Professor RM Crawford in *Historical Studies*, vol. 3, No. 9, October 1944. See also Stuart Macintyre, *A History for a Nation: Ernest Scott and the Making of Australian History* (1994), p. 113.

53 *Education Gazette and Teachers Aid*, 20 September 1909.



Royal Arcade, in Bourke Street, Melbourne. Here at a public meeting on 21 May 1909, the Historical Society of Victoria was formed, with Professor Harrison Moore as Chairman, Henry Gyles Turner and Alfred Deakin as Vice-Presidents, and Alfred Greig as Secretary. Deakin would be Prime Minister again within a fortnight.

La Trobe Library Picture Collection,
State Library of Victoria.

The correspondence, [Mr Scott] said, which passed during the administration of the Port Phillip District by Latrobe from 1839 to 1854, between the Superintendent, as he was until 1848, and the ruling authorities, must have been considerable. It would deal with public administration, disposal of land, the gold discoveries, the attempted introduction of convicts and much else of value to the student of colonial history. These documents were stored in the Lands Office, and a systematic study would reveal much interesting material. They should be sifted, arranged, and bound up in volumes and preserved after the manner adopted in the London Records Office. A resolution embodying Mr Scott's suggestion was carried.⁵⁴

On 8 August 1910, Greig wrote to the Premier, John Murray, requesting to lay before him

reasons for taking action on the following subjects—(1), the proper arrangement, binding and making available for the use of students of the papers in possession of the Departments dating from the commencement of La Trobe's administration ... to 1854; (2) the steps that should be taken to ensure the preservation of official papers which may no longer be valuable for departmental purposes, but which nevertheless may be of great importance from the point of view of Victorian history.⁵⁵

Greig indicated Council's concerns that quantities of early official papers had been destroyed, and that 'indiscriminate destruction of records is from the historical point of view, very serious'. He also noted that 'modern governments everywhere ... are arranging for the preservation and collation of their official documents'.⁵⁶

On 17 August 1910, Premier Murray saw the Historical Society deputation led by Alfred Greig, and also including Professor Harrison Moore, EA Petherick, GB Vasey and Charles Long.⁵⁷

54 *The Age*, 22 April 1910, press clippings book, RHSV.

55 Greig to Premier Murray, 8 October 1910, Premier's Department inwards correspondence, P10/2877, VPRS 5716/P1.

56 *ibid.*

57 Charles R Long, 'a former school teacher, who was an authority on memorials to Victoria's pioneers'; AT Latham, 'Mr Latham looks back over fifty years' in Perry, W. (ed.), *A Souvenir of the Society's Diamond Jubilee* (1969), RHSV.



Premier John Murray, who in 1910 assured the Historical Society of Victoria that there would be no wanton destruction of official records. Within a few short years, a later government broke his promise.

La Trobe Library Picture Collection,
State Library of Victoria.

The Society advised that it had established a sub-committee to study 'documentary material preserved in the Government Offices of Victoria', and, having drawn attention to concerns about the destruction of public records, it advocated the creation of a record office and a custodian for it.⁵⁸ It also lamented that 'sometimes old official documents and records were burnt to clear up accumulations of rubbish, and that papers that would be of interest to future historians were destroyed'.⁵⁹

The deputation was allowed to inspect the vaults in which the records of the Chief Secretary's Office were stored and 'to inspect the letter books of La Trobe, while he was Superintendent of the Port Phillip district'.⁶⁰ And the Premier reacted positively to their message. He 'fully recognized and appreciated the work in which they were engaged', and was prepared to issue instructions to the Law Department, as requested by the Society, to country Court Houses at Ballarat, Bendigo and other places where such papers might be found, that no paper should be destroyed until approved by the Head Office. The clearly sympathetic Premier promised that there would be no wanton destruction of official papers and records.

An interesting aside to this process was that late in 1909, Greig wrote to a number of Victorian country newspapers promoting the establishment of sub-centres of the Historical Society. One such sub-centre was established at Yarram in June 1911, at a meeting convened by the local vicar, Reverend George Cox. Among several historical documents tabled on this occasion were the first records of the general sessions at Palmerston, commencing about 1858. According to a report, 'up to the advent of Mr Dunderdale as clerk of courts in the late sixties, the records were very loosely kept'.⁶¹ This is the only reference relating to the foundation of the Historical Society of Victoria that cites particular public records as having been brought forward during the process.

The tireless Alfred Greig also wrote to Constable Corrie, of the 'Police Station, Palmerston, Port Albert' on 1 June 1911, about old records. He wrote:

58 Chief Secretary's inwards correspondence 1910/G6874, on file 13/N10695, VPRS 3992/P0.

59 *The Argus*, 18 August 1910, press clippings book, RHSV, p. 12.

60 Ernest Scott to Under-Secretary, William Alfred Callaway, 16 April 1912, Chief Secretary's inwards correspondence 12/L3823, on file 13/N10695, VPRS 3992/P0.

61 *South Gippsland Chronicle*, 9 June 1911, press clippings book, RHSV.

In search of information regarding Gippsland in the days of the late Mr CJ Tyers (Crown Lands Commissioner), I recently wrote to his son, Mr CJ Tyers, of Ararat. Mr Tyers says 'Constable Corrie told me that he had come across a lot of interesting old records of the forties of my father's time, which he had sent to the Law Department, Melbourne.' I would be much obliged if you could inform me of the nature of these records. If they consist of the letter books of the Alberton police office, I have already examined them, but if they are records of the Commissioner's Department, I have not yet seen them. I can find no mention of Palmerston in the very early records. Is it the modern name of the old Victoria township or is it applied to the settlement at Port Albert itself? As far as I can ascertain, the original courthouse was at Alberton but was moved to Tarraville in 1854. Tarraville I understand, is now in a state of decay. When then did Palmerston become the seat of government?⁶²

A fortnight later, Greig was able to advise George Cox that Constable Corrie had informed him 'there are a number of old records in a room of the Palmerston court house, which have been removed from Tarraville and Alberton and stand there in haphazard fashion. Mr Corrie expresses his willingness to assist in the work of sorting them out, if authority be obtained for their examination.' Greig suggested that Cox approach the Clerk of Courts at Yarram, 'who is the official custodian of the documents'.⁶³ Greig, along with other founders of the Society, was doing his own original research too, the results of which were read at a meeting on 30 June 1911, and later published as 'The Beginnings of Gippsland' in the *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. II, 1912.

The two articles that comprise this talk quote a single public record: the letter book of the Alberton Police Office for 1845.⁶⁴ The single reference that Greig chose to make was to Crown Lands Commissioner Tyers' letter to La Trobe of 1 January 1845, concerning the duties of his Clerk, HBC Marlay. Since this is one of the first letters in a lengthy book of correspondence, it could perhaps be inferred that Greig did not delve deeply into the record. Nonetheless, this seems to be the first use of original public records in the published proceedings of the Society, and Greig's article

62 Greig to Corrie, 1 June 1911, outwards letter book, RHSV.

63 Greig to Cox, 17 June 1911, outwards letter book, RHSV.

64 *Victorian Historical Magazine*, October 1912, p. 67.



The letter book of the Alberton Police Office 1845–54. One of the records saved from Alberton Court House, it was finally donated to the Historical Society of Victoria in 1934 and accessioned there as item 6264, before ultimately passing to Public Record Office Victoria.

PROV, VPRS 43/P0.



Yet another save from the Alberton Court House. This letter from the Crown Prosecutor in Melbourne, James Croke, to the Crown Lands Commissioner for Gippsland, Charles J Tyers, at Port Albert, is, as can be seen on its accession stamp, the founding accession of the Historical Society of Victoria collection (accession no. 1).

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

otherwise relies on books, newspapers and reminiscences. This letter book, which appears to have passed to Cox's keeping for some time, was ultimately accessioned by the Historical Society of Victoria as item 6264, and is noted in the Society's accession register as a 'ledger' received from Reverend George Cox in 1934. It was later passed to Public Record Office Victoria as VPRS 43. In this volume there is also a fragmentary note in the handwriting of Alfred Greig.

Apart from this volume, there are also loose letters from Alberton that had been sent to the Law Department and now reside in the collection of the Society. In a series of papers of the Alberton Police Magistrate's Office, similarly held by the Society, there are some twenty-seven documents from the period 1844–55, listed as 'presented to the Historical Society of Victoria by the Secretary of the Law Department'.⁶⁵ The earliest of these is a letter to Crown Lands Commissioner CJ Tyers, Port Albert, from James Croke, Crown Prosecutor for Port Phillip, dated 29 July 1844, carrying Historical Society accession no. 1. Among the other documents are various letters to the Police Magistrate or the Bench of Magistrates, Alberton, from William Lonsdale, Charles La Trobe and Charles Lydiard, the latter who 'joined the police service as subaltern on 1st July 1851 and commanded the first police escort from the gold fields of Victoria'. A further eleven items are listed in a letter dated 29 March 1915 to Greig from Thomas O Callaghan,⁶⁶ writing from a private address, 'Carlton House, Drummond St, North Carlton'. O Callaghan concludes: 'Authenticated signatures of early officials, such as these are, will soon be difficult to obtain, as they are by no means plentiful even now.'⁶⁷

A remarkable circumstance disclosed by these documents is that, just as the collection of archives in the Public Library was inaugurated in 1903 with a transfer from the Secretary to the Law Department, so the collection of the Historical Society was also inaugurated years later with a donation from the same source. Moreover, the records in each case seem to have come from the same group in Alberton Court House which had so concerned Howitt and Dunderdale twenty years earlier. The letter book, which parallels the loose letters, symbolises these connections: it was accessioned at different times into both the Public Library and the Historical Society collections, and also provided the source of the first reference to public records used in the *Victorian Historical Magazine*—one furthermore penned by the founder of the Society.

65 RHSV Box 34/1, MS 00614.

66 Thomas O Callaghan was a Council Member of the Historical Society of Victoria. Possibly Thomas Daniel O'Callaghan, Clerk of Courts at Flemington at this time.

67 O'Callaghan to Greig, 29 March 1915, inwards letter book, RHSV.

The second issue of the *Victorian Historical Magazine*, in May 1912, contained not only this key article by Greig but also the report of the Society's sub-committee on official records. The report begins by quoting interviews with senior officials regarding 'wanton destruction of records', and, foreshadowing modern terminology, describes history as 'corporate memory'.⁶⁸ There follows, over several pages, the first of a number of surveys of public records that were to occur from time to time. This survey provides useful information on various record groups that later formed the core of the nineteenth-century holdings of the Victorian Archives—namely the departmental records of the Chief Secretary, Lands, Education (including Denominational and National Schools Boards) and Customs. In concluding, the article makes the first published case for a records office: 'What is really wanted is a central records office, to which all official papers should be sent when no longer required for departmental purposes.'⁶⁹

On the issue of the destruction of official documents, the Committee stated:

Quantities of papers have been destroyed, without regard to their historical interest and importance, but simply because they were no longer required for departmental purposes ... One distinguished officer told the Committee that he remembered the burning, while he was a junior, of several tons of paper, in piles, without discrimination as to their value. Another senior officer in another department remembers a quantity of papers filling a floor of a room to a depth of at least a foot being burnt. A third officer in yet another department one day witnessed the destruction of a huge quantity of documents, and himself rescued from the fire some valuable files which throw a most interesting light on the early settlement of Victoria.⁷⁰

In the meantime, Ernest Scott,⁷¹ of the University of Melbourne, arranged to borrow from the Chief Secretary's Office six volumes of La Trobe's correspondence, which he transcribed over the next eight years.⁷² In 1913, Scott started feeding into the public arena the results of his research on these sources. On 25 August, he gave a talk to the Historical Society on the laying-out of

68 *Victorian Historical Magazine*, May 1912, p. 27.

69 *Victorian Historical Magazine*, May 1912, p. 31.

70 *Victorian Historical Magazine*, May 1912, p. 27. Unfortunately it is not clear what records are referred to.

71 (Sir) Ernest Scott (1867–1939), Professor of History at the University of Melbourne 1914–36. Later co-author of the Scott–Wood Report on Commonwealth Archives, December 1926.

72 Chief Secretary's Office inwards correspondence, 1913/N10695, VPRS 03992/P0.

Victorian Official Records.

A committee of the Historical Society has been devoting attention to the documentary historical material preserved in the Government Offices of Victoria, and it seems advisable to publish a brief account of the results of the inquiries made. It is well that students who may desire to study particular phases of the history of this State should be furnished with a general idea of the quantity and nature of the material available, and of where it is to be found.

It is an unfortunate fact that there has been a great deal of destruction of official documents. Quantities of papers have been burnt, by accident, without regard to their historical interest and importance, but chiefly because, in the opinion of responsible officials, they were no longer required for departmental purposes. There is great reason to fear that officers, concerned only with their own administrative functions, have often been oblivious of the fact that it is precisely when official papers cease to be departmentally useful that they become historically valuable. It is quite certain that the Ministers of England, of France, of Germany, of the United States, of Canada, and of other great countries which are great ones by their national ambitions, would never have been written, as we have them written, had as they are still being written by responsible men, if the destruction that has been permitted in Victoria had been possible there.

The distinguished public officer told the committee that he remembered the burning, while he was a junior, of several tons of papers, in piles, without discrimination of their value. Another senior officer in another Department remembered a quantity of papers filling the floor of a room to the depth of at least a foot being burnt. A third officer in yet another Department one day witnessed the destruction of a large quantity of documents, and himself rescued from the fire some valuable files which throw a most interesting light on the early settlement of Victoria. In another case, an officer of high scientific attainments saved a mass of papers being taken away from Government Offices to be burnt at a rubbish destructor. He noticed some printed books among them, and, picking up one, recognised it as a work of some scientific value. He therefore saved it from the flames, and sent it to the Library of the Royal Society. The fact came to the knowledge of the Department that had ordered the destruction, which thereupon demanded the restoration of the book!

It is probably quite true that many of the papers so destroyed were of no use. But the point is that there should be no destruction without examination. History is, in one sense, responsive memory, and a civilized people is distinguished from a

Almost from its foundation, the Historical Society of Victoria fought for the preservation of public records. This comprehensive report appeared in the *Victorian Historical Magazine* as early as 1912.

La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria.

Melbourne, based on Lonsdale's letter book. This talk is of great interest, and includes references to Lonsdale's instructions, as well as to the choice of the location of settlement, the difficulty of managing the insubordinate surveyor Russell, and the naming of Melbourne's 'little streets'.⁷³ This talk became a model for the use of early public records for historical research in Victoria. Three years later, Scott published his *Short History of Australia*, in which the mark of the 1913 article can clearly be seen, with verbatim quotation of Lonsdale's instructions, the choice of the location of settlement and so on.⁷⁴ Archives-based history was making its mark. By the 1920s, as Stuart Macintyre has observed, Scott was standardising the practice: '[He] made new manuscript deposits the point of departure for many of his papers.'⁷⁵

In the same week, the Historical Society of Queensland was inaugurated with a speech by the constitutional theorist ACV Melbourne on 'Methods of Historical Investigation with Particular Reference to Australia'. Melbourne spoke forcefully on Australia's archival deficiencies:

Not long since, valuable public records were destroyed by fire in South Australia, and the same dangers existed throughout Australia. There were no public archives whereby such happenings could be rendered impossible ... records of great value were constantly being destroyed.

These happenings in far-off Queensland were carefully noted by the Historical Society in Victoria, and the Queensland press clipping of this address was kept by the Society with its other records.⁷⁶

War broke out in 1914 before the campaign in Victoria had achieved any positive outcome, but the Society continued the pressure. On 13 February 1915, Alfred Greig wrote to Henry Gyles Turner, President of the Library Trustees, requesting that Turner receive at his private residence a deputation consisting of Professor Harrison Moore, Professor Ernest Scott and Greig himself. The deputation's purpose would be to discuss with Turner 'the proposals we have formulated concerning the establishment of a Records Office in the Public Library buildings'. Conceding that 'we are well aware it would be useless to expect the Government to take any positive steps in the matter under present conditions', Greig nonetheless insisted 'we are anxious to get into touch with the Trustees'.⁷⁷

73 *The Argus*, 26 August 1913, press clippings book, RHSV.

74 Ernest Scott, *A Short History of Australia* (1916), pp. 159–60.

75 Stuart Macintyre, *A History for a Nation: Ernest Scott and the Making of Australian History* (1994), p. 175.

76 [Brisbane] *Daily Mail*, 22 August 1913, press clippings book, RHSV.

77 Public Library of Victoria, inwards correspondence, unregistered item, VPRS 10276/P0.

In June, the same team with the addition of MM Phillips of the Australian Natives Association waited upon the Trustees as a group,

to apprise the Trustees of the Society's intention of asking the Government, when a suitable opportunity arises, to establish a Record Office, where early official records may be made available for examination by students, and to ascertain the possibility of space being reserved for this purpose in the Public Library buildings, and the conditions under which the Trustees would undertake the supervision of such a department.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, a separate strand of interest in records arose from the appointment on 17 February 1916 of a Royal Commission on the State Public Service.⁷⁹ The Commission, headed by the General Manager of the State Savings Bank, Alex Cooch, had as its other members Joseph Tweddle and William Anderson, the Secretary to the Law Department. It examined a wide range of issues concerning public service recruitment, business methods, systems, structures and opportunities for savings. A Progress Report was issued by the Commission in 1916 and its Final Report in 1917. Along with the latter were summaries of the implementation strategies following from the report's findings, including the disposal of obsolete records to effect savings.

Since some of the general recommendations made by the Commission were quite bizarre, Cooch came into direct conflict with the Public Service Commissioner, GC Morrison, who provided a stringent and detailed rebuttal of the Commission's Final Report on 9 April 1918. As Morrison signalled, many of the Commission's findings—notably a radical proposal for a Central Accounts Branch in government—reflected scant knowledge of the principles of responsible government, and the sweeping recommendations for records destruction were inconsistent with a broad view of public service responsibilities.

Already in its Progress Report, the Commission had found that

the greater part of the huge basement at the Public Offices, Treasury Gardens, is filled with obsolete departmental papers, documents and account books. These relate to the transactions of many years ago, and cannot possibly be of any useful service today.

78 *ibid.*, 15/676.

79 Royal Commission on the State Public Service, 1917 VPRS 2960/P0; Premier's file P20/1073, VPRS 1163/P0. Previous Royal Commissions into the Public Service had been held in 1852 (the Hearn Commission), 1870, and 1882 (the Wrixon Commission).

There is however, a great disinclination in the official mind to destroy any document, no matter how trivial it may be. Officers always have a dread that some day some Minister or Member of Parliament may require the production of these papers or accounts and that it would be a reflection on the department if they could not be promptly produced. One officer gave as a reason for the retention of these obsolete official papers that the Historical Society 'is keen on searching old records'. But the great mass of these records cannot be regarded as being of public importance or historical value.⁸⁰

To counter these perceived shortcomings, the Progress Report recommended that each department appoint two or three officers to go through obsolete records and order the destruction of those without any real value.

When the Commission's Progress Report was considered by Cabinet on 24 July 1916, the recommendation concerning obsolete records was approved, and departments were instructed by letter of 2 August to carry out the decision.⁸¹ During the life of the Commission, a Summary of Departmental Action on the Progress Report's Recommendations was prepared and printed. It detailed the action taken by thirteen separate departments regarding the recommendations for the destruction of obsolete files. Ominously, under the heading 'Mines Department', it states: 'Quantities of old papers and books have been destroyed.' Indeed William Dickson, the Secretary for Mines, reported to his Minister on 23 March 1917 that 'some tons of old books and papers have been cut up and sent to the paper mills'.⁸² This seems to have included the central correspondence of the department up to that time. However, other departments approached the destruction requirement with care, allowing significant nineteenth-century record groups to survive. Both the Law Department⁸³ and the Chief Secretary's Office,⁸⁴ for example, reported compliance with the Royal Commission's instruction on obsolete records, yet seem to have done so without destroying their own central correspondence.

80 Royal Commission into the Working of Public Departments (sic), 1916, Progress Report, p. 17.

81 Premier's Department inwards correspondence, P16/2715 on file P20/1073, VPRS 1163/P0.

82 Premier's Department inwards correspondence, P17/1432 on file P20/1073, VPRS 1163/P0.

83 Law Department inwards correspondence, 16/6374 on file 28/451, VPRS 266/P0.

84 Chief Secretary's Office inwards correspondence, 16/T8373 on file 28/U945, VPRS 4723/P0.



A Royal Commission in 1916 referred to the basement of the Public Offices in Treasury Place as being filled with 'obsolete departmental papers' that should be destroyed. This is part of one such basement, many years later.

PROV, Public Access Photograph Collection.

The Royal Commission looked in some depth at departmental record systems. On its behalf, Henry Octavius Allan of the Lands Department visited sixty-four departments and agencies to examine their records handling practices. This research provided the basis for an appendix to the Commission's Final Report of 1917. While usefully over-viewing records systems of the day, Allan, who had spent nearly forty years in the public service, and from 1916 was Clerk in Charge of the Correspondence Section of the Lands Department,⁸⁵ was a stern critic of those whom he regarded as incompetent, including those senior to himself. Referring to the Neglected Children's Department, he reported that 'The Secretary of this Department is a new appointee, on probation. The system of this Department is the worst I have seen ... Steps should be taken at once to get records in order.'⁸⁶ But while the Secretary in question, John Molloy, only took up duty in this position on 19 March 1917, he was hardly a raw recruit, having twenty-eight years service to his credit by then!⁸⁷

Although the Royal Commissioners thus gained an early awareness of what would later become 'records management', they showed no awareness of the role of archives, focusing instead on the destruction of obsolete records. Their comments include statements such as: 'In accordance with our recommendation, officers were appointed to go through this official lumber, and great clearances were effected. We think this process of clearance might be extended to some of the offices where "dead" files and other useless matter still lumber the shelves.'⁸⁸ So while the Historical Society campaigned vigorously to save old records, the Royal Commission worked no less vigorously to destroy as many of them as possible.

In December 1916, AS Kenyon⁸⁹ advised Greig of the Historical Society as to the state of affairs. Greig replied:

85 Return of Persons Employed in the Public Service, 31 December 1915, 1916, 1917.

86 The Departmental Records Systems, Appendix to the Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, 1917, p. 130.

87 Return of Persons Employed in the Public Service, 31 December 1917.

88 The Departmental Records Systems, Appendix to the Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service, 1917, p. 107.

89 Alfred Stephen Kenyon (1867–1943), a Commissioner of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, prolific historian and numismatist, co-author with RV Billis of the archetypal studies of squatting in Victoria, *Pastures New* (1930) and *Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip* (1932), stalwart of the Historical Society of Victoria.

I was much impressed by your statement that orders had gone forth for the destruction of early departmental records. In what quarter should we make representations of our views? The ideal is, as you know, that all early records of historical value should be stored in the Public Library for use by students, but this project is kept in abeyance by the knowledge that it is useless to approach the government at present with any suggestions involving additional expenditure. All those who have had the opportunity of viewing the documents seem to be obsessed with the idea of the vastness of the task ... the records themselves will gradually disappear ... surely it would be better that they should be crammed into packing cases in the Public Library vaults waiting for a generation yet unborn?⁹⁰

During this period, some irreplaceable major record series were lost, such as the central correspondence of the Mines Department, destroyed in August 1916.⁹¹ It also appears that early correspondence of the Public Works Department was destroyed at the same time, as Ernest Pitt reported in 1928 that:

in accordance with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the State Public Service, 1917, most of the inward correspondence up to 1900 was destroyed some years ago. A further request to the Secretary to destroy files from 1900 to 1905, in February 1923, was approved. Special files were excepted from this decision.⁹²

However, some minor transfers to the Public Library were also effected during these years. These included the transfer from the Police Department on 10 August 1914 of a letter book that rather confusingly includes both the letters of Crown Lands Commissioner TH Gisborne from 1839 to 1840,⁹³ and, upside down at the other end, the staffing rosters and other reports of Gisborne Police Station from 1853 to 1857. The word 'Gisborne' seems to be the only common factor, but future archival research will be needed to unravel fully the conundrum of this volume. The Library appears to have accessioned it into its Manuscript Collection, assigning it the number M513 and storing it

⁹⁰ Greig to Kenyon, 16 December 1916, RHSV outwards letter book, no. 20.

⁹¹ Report of Ernest R Pitt on the Records of the Mines Branch, Department of Public Works and Mines, 1928, VPRS 5716/P1.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Unusually, this volume has been assigned two VPRS numbers, VPRS 9/P1 and VPRS 25/P0.

in 'Ms Cupboard 6, Shelf 1'.⁹⁴ The accession is separately recorded at each end of the volume: 10 August 1914 at one end, and 2 September 1914 at the other. The Library acknowledged receipt of this item in a letter to the Chief Commissioner of Police, dated 10 August 1914.⁹⁵ Other small transfers include further volumes of Convict Indents from Geelong Police Station in 1918.⁹⁶

Proof that the Historical Society's representations had not taken root by 1918 is amply provided by the records destruction generated by the Royal Commission. But it is also further evidenced by a letter to the Premier on 27 June 1918 from Percy Berry, written on Henry Berry and Co. letterhead.⁹⁷ With the blessing of the Premier's Department, Berry had been searching old records for postage stamps to sell on behalf of the war effort. He had suggested to the Premier that 'if I find in neglected condition documents of historic interest I should secure them and hand to your office for transfer to the Museum or other suitable place'. The Premier replied with caution, suggesting that 'it would be better for you to hand over any such documents to the Head of the Department concerned rather than send them to [the Premier's Department] to be dealt with'.⁹⁸

In November 1918, a further deputation from the Historical Society of Victoria sought to meet with Edmund Armstrong to discuss the Society's wish to secure the removal to the Public Library of the early letter books and correspondence files of La Trobe, Lonsdale and Hoddle. Greig indicated that the Society felt these records should be transferred 'even if nothing more than storage accommodation is provided for them at the Library', and that by their transfer 'an important step towards the formation of a State Record Office will have been taken'.⁹⁹

Later that year, Sir Frank Madden approached the Premier to ascertain whether the 'vacant land adjoining Parliament House', which had been in a state of neglect for some years, could be reserved for a Records Office.¹⁰⁰ This was followed on 30 May 1919 by a letter from Henry Gyles Turner, as President of the Library Trustees, to Premier Harry Lawson, requesting this space for a Records Office. Turner told the Premier that '[the Trustees] have recently been urged to establish a Records Office in connection with the institution, and would be glad to do so except for the

94 Note inside front cover of the volume.

95 Armstrong to Chief Commissioner of Police, 8 August 1914, Public Library outwards letter book, VPRS 805/P0.

96 Public Library outwards correspondence, letters 293 and 329, VPRS 802/P0.

97 Premier's Department, file P18/5621, VPRS 1163/P1.

98 Premier's Department, outwards letter book 1918, letter 1736, 1 July 1918, VPRS 1161/P0.

99 Public Library of Victoria inwards correspondence, 18/1308A, VPRS 10276/P0.

100 E La Touche Armstrong and RD Boys, *The Book of the Public Library 1906-32*, p. 40.



In 1919, Sir Frank Madden sought to have this triangle of land adjoining Parliament House reserved as the site for a Records Office. Parliament's Buildings Committee refused, depriving Melbourne of an appropriate site for a state archives. Some may prefer the fountain that was built there instead.

Photograph by Jo Bradley.

question of room. They suggest that the triangular piece of land belonging to Parliament House at the corner of Evelyn and Albert Sts be reserved as a site for a Records Office.’ However, there were other contenders for the site: Melbourne High School, Melbourne City Council and the Repatriation Committee. The matter was referred to the Buildings Committee of Parliament, who on 25 November 1919 declined the Library’s request.¹⁰¹ The Records Office would have to wait.

In November 1919, the next step was taken when the Historical Society sought to meet the Chief Secretary on the same issue. A letter, jointly signed by Alfred Greig as Secretary and Ernest Scott as Chairman of the Society, noted that although the time might not be opportune for creating a new department to undertake the cataloguing and classification of records, important items ‘should be placed in a special room in some public building, to form the nucleus of a State Records Office’. Specifically, these items would include the letter books of Lonsdale and La Trobe (1836–51), the Duplicate Despatches (1851–60) and all inwards correspondence relating to them, as well as any accompanying loose documents, the latter being filed in order of date and under some system. Also, the letter contended, ‘these records should be made accessible to the growing number of students who, at the University and elsewhere, are devoting special attention to the history of their native land’.¹⁰²

Discussions between the Historical Society and the government on these matters were protracted, extending until 1922. In that year, the Public Library requested that a responsible officer be allowed to examine ‘a number of documents connected with the early history of Victoria’ in the vaults of the government offices. On 18 September, the Premier asked the heads of six departments—Chief Secretary’s, Public Works, Education, Lands, Treasury and Law—to allow an officer to undertake such inspections.¹⁰³

The earliest transfer of local government records initiated by the Public Library appears to have occurred in 1923. On 3 August of that year, a request from the Library, apparently prompted by John Shirlow,¹⁰⁴ one of its Trustees and a notable etcher, was sent to the Town Clerk of the City of Melbourne. This request states: ‘Mr. Shirlow, who is a Trustee of the above Institution [i.e. the

101 Premier’s inwards correspondence, unregistered items on file P27/3834, VPRS 1163/P0.

102 Scott and Greig to Chief Secretary, 18 November 1919, Chief Secretary’s inwards correspondence, file 19/A5779, VPRS 3992/P0.

103 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P22/2620, VPRS 5716/P1.

104 John Shirlow (1869–1936), etcher and art master at Scotch College, Trustee of the Public Library. His obituary is in *The Argus*, 27 June 1936, and there is a biography in RH Croll, *The Etched Work of John Shirlow* (192?).



This fascinating photo of one of the famous horse tram bodies at Sunnyside, Kallista, shows John Shirlow, Mrs Aeneas Gunn, CJ Dennis and Garry Roberts, head of the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company. Shirlow initiated the first transfer of local government records to the Public Library's Archives Collection in 1923.

Reproduced from Robert Henderson Croll, *I Recall: Collections and Recollections*, Robertson and Mullens Limited (Melbourne, 1939).

Library], tells me that there is in your office a letter file of Governor La Trobe. This would be an extremely valuable addition to the Records at the Public Library.¹⁰⁵ The file transfer was duly agreed to by the General Purposes and Legislative Committee of the Melbourne City Council, on the Wednesday following 24 August 1923. A note on the manuscript says: 'File handed to Mr. Boys.¹⁰⁶ Thanked. 6/9/23.' Following the completion of this transfer, the Chief Librarian wrote to Shirlow on 12 September, congratulating him: 'Your "find" has ... led to good results and the Library is much indebted to you.'¹⁰⁷ A month afterwards, 'a number of government and miscellaneous letters received by Council up to 1857' were also sought by the Library. The Town Clerk, W McCall, advised on 19 September that the Council agreed to this further transfer.¹⁰⁸ The volumes in question are marked as having been accessioned by the Library on 1 October 1923.

Transfer to the Public Library of the correspondence and letter books of Lonsdale and La Trobe, which the Historical Society had been advocating since 1918, finally occurred in July 1925 and October 1926.¹⁰⁹

In 1927, a further Board of Inquiry was held into 'Methods in the Public Service'.¹¹⁰ This Board was constituted by J Wallace Ross, a public accountant, and its inquiry drew attention to the difficulty of locating files in departments, and to the amount of storage space occupied by files. In contrast to the 1917 Commission, Ross had some—albeit superficial—awareness of archives issues. While he recommended a conference of Chief Clerks to formulate uniform methods of registration for records and correspondence, he also deplored 'reluctance to discard ancient matter', and reported with evident alarm that 'in the Chief Secretary's Department no files have been destroyed since the operation of responsible government in Victoria'.¹¹¹ The Board further recommended that departmental committees be formed to decide upon and arrange for the destruction or pulping of old papers, and that less expensive accommodation be provided for old papers.¹¹²

105 Public Library outwards letter book, letter 467, VPRS 802/P0.

106 Robert Douglass Boys (1866–1942), Chief Librarian of the Public Library 1925–31, author of *First Years at Port Phillip* (1935), 'a quiet and retiring man with a clear and analytical mind'. In 1932 he co-authored an update of the chronology *Books of the Public Library* with former Chief Librarian Edmund La Touche Armstrong.

107 Public Library outwards letter book, letter 563, VPRS 802/P0.

108 Public Library inwards correspondence, 23/1371 VPRS 10276/P0. The records are currently registered as series VPRS 3621 and VPRS 3622.

109 Public Library outwards letter book, letter 578, VPRS 802/P0 and letter 939, VPRS 802/P0.

110 Board of Inquiry into the Methods in the Public Service, 1927, VPRS 2939/P0.

111 *ibid.*, p. 26.

112 *ibid.*, p. 83.

Meanwhile, on 30 November 1927, the Historical Society of Victoria advised the Premier of its resolution ‘that the Honorable the Premier be requested to issue instructions to all Government Departments to the effect that no official records or documents should at any time be destroyed without being first offered to the Trustees of the Public Library for inclusion in their Archives Department’. The Premier’s Department referred this matter to the Chief Librarian, RD Boys, for advice. At the beginning of January 1928, Boys duly advised that at the present time, most of the departments did notify the Library, but that it would be more satisfactory if the instructions as requested by the Historical Society were issued. Boys also suggested that printed notices be posted in the various vaults and store-rooms advising against the unauthorised destruction of documents. The Premier agreed to both requests, and on 17 January, a circular was issued by the head of the Premier’s Department, Herbert Theodore Vickers, requiring reference to the Library and instructing that notices be put up in vaults.¹¹³ Over the next twenty-five years, no single administrative action was more significant than this for the future of Victorian archives. The previous flow of records towards the Public Library became a flood, and as records filled every spare corner, the case for an archival solution became irresistible.

In February 1928, a circular was issued conveying the Premier’s Instruction that no documents be destroyed without reference to the Public Library Trustees. The circular also intimated that ‘a systematic inspection of Departmental records [would] be made during this month’.¹¹⁴ The issuing of the circular was followed by a Survey of Records in Departments, conducted by Ernest R Pitt of the Public Library.

Pitt provided a report on his inspections, dated 4 April 1928:

These records are mainly housed in vaults. Though the general arrangement is fair ... there is still much to be desired in order to make these documents readily available ... Want of constant use has tended to make them dusty ... the vaults are in many cases congested, making systematic arrangement impossible ... I beg to suggest that such of the documents as are required for an Archives Department and are not wanted by the Department concerned, be transferred to the Library immediately.¹¹⁵

113 Vickers to fifteen heads of department and authorities, 17 January 1928, Premier’s inwards correspondence, P27/3716, VPRS 5716/P1.

114 Public Library outwards letter book 1927–28, letter 66, VPRS 802/P0.

115 The original of Pitt’s report forms Chief Secretary’s inwards correspondence, 1928/U4216. There are also extracts in other series.

He also noted that the recommendations of the 1917 Royal Commission on the State Public Service, regarding the destruction of account books and other records that had ‘lost their value’, seemed to have been implemented.

Pitt advised that he had spoken to many responsible officers, and

though no promise was made to them of the establishment of an Archives Department, most of the offers to present these records were made on the assumption that they would not only be preserved from destruction, but be made available for reference when required.

This suggests that among the public servants of the day, there were some who recognised the importance of preserving selected public records, despite the fact that only the previous year they had been under pressure from the Ross Inquiry to destroy records.

Attached to Pitt’s survey are brief reports on the records he inspected at the Labour, Health, Law, Public Works, Agriculture, Lands, and Ports and Harbours departments. In relation to the shipping records at Ports and Harbours, Pitt notes that ‘as the removal of the important documents in this department to the Commonwealth Statistician’s Office was contemplated, immediate steps were taken to procure them, and nearly all have now been transferred to the Library’. However, less promisingly, he also notes that ‘correspondence prior to 1880 has been destroyed, and correspondence from 1880 to 1900 has been sent to the Williamstown depot’.

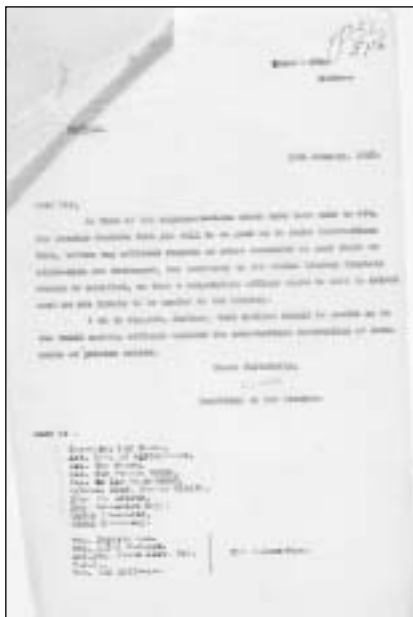
Some further inspections were undertaken later in 1928 by William Baud¹¹⁶ of the Library. In September, after visiting the Audit Office, Baud annotated his inspection of vouchers for teachers’ salaries and contingencies 1875–1900 as ‘not taken’.¹¹⁷ The same month, he also inspected the Department of Labour and recommended the transfer of some bound volumes of Hansard and overseas publications, which duly occurred.¹¹⁸ Though he may not have been an archivist, Baud was starting to exercise archival functions.¹¹⁹

116 William Charles Baud (1890–1945), member of the Pitt Board of Inquiry into Library Services 1940–44, and Chief Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria 1944–45. Held in high regard by colleagues, such as the literary historian Morris Miller, Baud’s career was cut short by his premature demise.

117 Baud to Boys, 16 September 1928, in folder marked ‘Audit Office’, VPRS 5716/P1.

118 Folder marked ‘Labour Department of’, VPRS 5716/P1.

119 By 1932, future Chief Librarian Colin McCallum was also taking part in inspections resulting from the Premier’s circular.



This 1928 Premier's circular, pasted on the doors of vaults in which records were kept, was critically important in preserving our heritage of public records. It required officers to consult with the Public Library before destroying records. The circular was re-issued several times during the years before archival legislation existed.

PROV, VPRS 5716/P1.

In addition, a number of offers were made to transfer records to the Library. A most important example of this related to the Shipping Passenger Lists, concerning which the Chief Librarian, RD Boys, wrote to the Engineer in Chief of Ports and Harbours, on 29 February 1928, as follows:

I understand that it is proposed that certain records of much historical importance should be transferred to the Commonwealth Statistician's Office. These records include the passenger lists of vessels arriving in Victoria since 1839, and a lexicographical index in five volumes of all vessels arriving up to December 31st 1900. There are also I understand bound volumes of Disposal Lists of Assisted Immigrants from 1839 to 1870.

I beg to suggest that these records, which relate to Victoria only, should remain in the custody of some State institution. The Public Library of Victoria is endeavoring to form, for the use of students engaged in historical research, a collection of State documents, and the Trustees would esteem it a favour if you would transfer these interesting records to the Public Library. They will of course undertake to have them properly housed and arranged, and to make them available for departmental and private enquiries.¹²⁰

These records were transferred in March 1928 and located in the 'Shipping Room' at the Public Library. Among other subsequent transfers were: in May 1928, further Convict Indents 1831–42 from the Law Department; in August 1929, a large accession of Education Department records; in October 1930, bundles of surveyor's records and letter books from the Lands Department; in May 1931, additional correspondence from the Lands Department; and in September 1933, Penal Department records from Pentridge.

These were consigned to at least five different locations around the Library building: the Convict Indents, to the strong room; the Melbourne City Council correspondence, along with previously transferred Duplicate Despatches, to the New Trustees Room; the Lands Department

120 Chief Librarian to Engineer in Charge, Ports and Harbours Department, loose letter 29/2/1928 in folder marked 'Mercantile Marine records', VPRS 5716/P1.



After Librarian Ernest Pitt surveyed records in government departments, the shipping records were saved and transferred early in 1928. These became one of the most used records series in the collection.

PROV, VPRS 947/P0.

material, variously to the Historical Collection and the Macarthur Basement; and the Education Department material, to the Verdon Basement.¹²¹ This latter—a long, dark and musty area which lay along Little Lonsdale Street beneath the Verdon Gallery—continued to serve as an archives repository for fifty years from 1929.

May 1929 also saw the opening by Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Irvine of the Victorian Historical Gallery in the Library. Its inaugural exhibition, on display for over a month, comprised loan items from the Historical Society of Victoria as well as items from the Library's own collection and from private individuals. Thereafter, the gallery was re-opened in October that year, on Sunday afternoons, and it resulted in 'the donation to the Trustees of many valuable historical objects'.¹²²

In 1931, the Report of the Public Library contained for the first time a section on Archives, where it was stated that:

a large collection of letters and documents from 1836 to 1888 was transferred in May and June from the Lands Department, and is at present housed in the basement of the Macarthur Gallery until such time as they can be properly arranged and catalogued by a competent archivist. It has been decided to transfer these and similar archives to the lower floor of the new McAllan Galleries. The appointment of an archivist will be advocated at the first suitable opportunity.¹²³

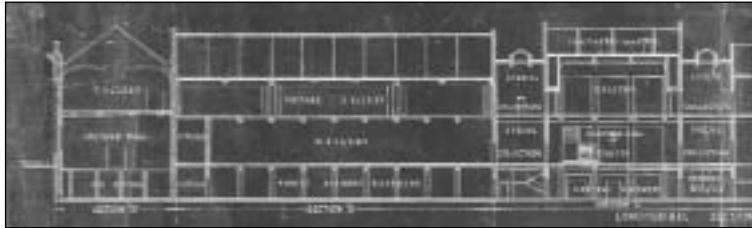
The following year, the Historical Exhibition was moved from Barry Hall to the ground floor of the McAllan Gallery, which had been purpose built for the storage of government records, using funds from the McAllan Bequest and from unemployment relief provided by the State Treasury. For a time at least, therefore, there was an apparently intentional focus on archival activities in this area.¹²⁴

121 The Verdon Basement lay beneath the Verdon Gallery, so named in 1893 in honour of Sir George Verdon, then President of the Library Trustees. See Armstrong, *Book of the Public Library* (1906), p. 71.

122 Public Library Report to Trustees 1929, VPRS 805/P0.

123 Public Library Report to Trustees 1931, pp. 18–19.

124 In 1946, the Library exchanged the lower McAllan Gallery for the room north of the entrance foyer (now Palmer Hall), where it was anticipated that the archives and historical collection would be located. This was delayed, and ultimately the creation of the La Trobe Library provided an alternative solution to the issue.



The handsome lower McAllan Gallery, constructed by 1932 facing La Trobe Street, was intended as Victoria's first purpose-built state archives. Unfortunately, the potential it offered was never realised.

Top: The constructed section appears on the elevation as 'Section B'.

PROV, VPRS 3686/P0.

Bottom: The constructed section today.

Photograph by Jo Bradley

The mid-1930s saw further small transfers of records to the Library. These included: some Melbourne Petty Sessions Registers 1840–46 from the Law Department, in 1932;¹²⁵ some Kelly records, purchased in the same year; and some Penal Department records, in 1934 and 1936.¹²⁶

In 1937, Ernest Pitt engaged in external campaigning for archival reforms—a difficult task for any public servant. Using the Historical Section of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science,¹²⁷ he managed to bring pressure on the Victorian and other governments. On 11 February 1937, AB Walkom, the Secretary of the Association, wrote to the Premier¹²⁸ advising that the Association, at a recent meeting in Auckland, had resolved to contact the governments of the Dominion, the Commonwealth and all Australian states. Its aim was to request that these governments institute various measures to strengthen archival capacity: that they instruct departments not to destroy any official documents without the sanction of the officer in charge of the government archives; that an archives department, under the control of a trained and competent archivist, be formed by each government; that all documents not required for current use be handed over to the archives department; and that each government provide its archives department with a sufficient and competent staff to enable its records to be indexed and made available for historical research. In a letter of 9 August 1938, addressed to the Government Archivist of Southern Rhodesia, Pitt disclosed that it had been he who had orchestrated the Association's resolution, 'in order to bring prominently before the Governments concerned the necessity for preserving their archives before it becomes too late'.¹²⁹

Also in 1937, Pitt reported in his Annual Report that, during the year,

it appeared to me desirable that the heads of departments should again issue warnings to officers against unauthorized destruction of documents and printed matter. As a result of my representations the Premier requested in July the departmental heads to issue instructions again that official records should not be destroyed without informing me, and that notices should be placed in the vaults warning officers against the unauthorized destruction of documents.¹³⁰

125 Public Library Report to the Trustees 1932, p. 25.

126 Public Library Report to the Trustees 1934, p. 21; Public Library Report to the Trustees 1936, p. 21.

127 Pitt's association with ANZAAS dated from at least 1921 and included stints as Victorian Secretary.

128 Premier's inwards correspondence, P37/0344 on file P58/256, VPRS 1163/P0.

129 Public Library outwards correspondence, letter no. 1042, VPRS 802/P0.

130 Public Library Report to Trustees 1937, pp. 27–8, VPRS 805/P0.

The letter from the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science was acknowledged on 16 February 1937. Several months later, LL Chapman, the Under-Secretary,¹³¹ advised that ‘as it is now over nine years since the instructions regarding the preservation of documents were issued, it is suggested that the instructions be again circulated’. Chapman also stated that ‘the question of the appointment of an archivist will receive consideration’. The penciled minute by the head of the Premier’s Department on 21 July 1937 notes: ‘Take action on above and advise association.’ The Premier’s Instruction of January 1928 was re-issued eight days later, on 29 July 1937.¹³²

In 1938, Pitt reported the receipt of ‘police records for the years 1832 [sic] to 1864, covering various districts of Victoria’.¹³³ As well, he noted that some records of Assistant Protector of Aborigines CW Sievwright, dating from 1840–41, had been purchased. ‘These last’, the report added, ‘are of unusual interest as reports from Sievwright have been missing from official papers on this subject in the library’.¹³⁴ Also unusual was the fact that this archival material was purchased rather than transferred. The nine new Sievwright records, which the Library accessioned as H8834–42, consist not of correspondence but of returns, including that of ‘Natives Fallen in with’, provisions distributed, and deaths and births. As such, they fit into a larger series of returns of Assistant Protectors that form Series VPRS 12.¹³⁵

A further batch of Chief Secretary’s files, dating from 1861 to 1870, was transferred in 1939, along with records of criminal trials from the Law Department, spanning from 1848 to 1900. Pitt commented in his Annual Report that ‘the accommodation of our historical records is becoming limited and the appointment of an archivist to make the information in these records accessible to the public is necessary’.¹³⁶

The advent of World War II brought a renewal of threats to pulp old records. Again too, the Historical Society of Victoria, the History School of the University of Melbourne and the Public Library of Victoria were the key allies in the battle to preserve historic records.

131 Permanent Head of the Chief Secretary’s Department, of which the Public Library was a Branch.

132 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P37/344 on file P58/256, VPRS 1163/P0.

133 Library Annual Report to Trustees 1938, p. 37.

134 *ibid.*, p. 40.

135 Purchases also included Kelly manuscripts and photographs, and a copy of Batman’s will, in 1932. See Public Library Victoria inwards correspondence, 32/132, VPRS 10276/P0 (re Kelly purchase), and 32/1142, VPRS 10276/P0 (re Batman purchase). The Probate Office copy of Batman’s will was transferred to PROV in 1977.

136 Public Library Annual Report 1939, p. 29.

This latest threat to the archives occurred in 1940, with the appointment of George Brown, Secretary of the Mines Department, as State Controller of Salvage. The danger lay specifically in that there might be a wholesale pulping of public records to assist the war effort. On 27 July 1940, Brown issued a circular advocating the appointment of a committee to look at reducing the number of forms in use, saving paper and recycling scrap paper. In the circular, Brown asserts:

In most Departments there are large stocks of hoarded papers as well as bound volumes of ancient records. Subject to the usual preliminary scrutiny by officials from the Melbourne Public Library ... it should be possible to make a very substantial clearance in this direction ... I have conferred with Austral Waste Products (associated with Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd) and this Company is prepared to purchase, on the basis of 30/- per ton, all paper coming forward in this manner.¹³⁷

A meeting of departmental heads, held on 12 August 1940, considered a wide range of suggestions, of which the Premier's Department file includes a copy, annotated to indicate those accepted and those rejected. Under the heading 'Waste Products', sub-heading 3 'Obsolete files', is ticked: 'Obsolete files, ledgers, account books etc now stored in vaults to be overhauled and made use of, or sold as waste (old papers and letter books sent to the public library).' These economies were considered and adopted by Cabinet on 26 August.¹³⁸ The final version, however, omitted reference to the Public Library, leaving a path clear for the indiscriminate destruction of records.

Austral Waste Products lost no time in acting, but fortunately its activities did not go unnoticed. On Wednesday, 4 September 1940, the *Ballarat Courier* ran a story entitled 'Judicial History: Warrants, Books, Briefs—What a Tale They Could Unfold!'. According to the story:

Warrants, writs, judge's notebooks and briefs of a thousand cases containing Ballarat's judicial history of 80 years—dating back to 1840—were stacked for removal yesterday at the Court House. They made a pile six feet high from one end of the side verandah to the other. The reason of course is the plan for utilizing waste paper for the war effort. Contract with the government has been entered into by Austral Waste Products ... collecting by the Company from court houses is state wide ...

137 Premier's inwards correspondence, P40/1655 on file P58/256, VPRS 1163/P0.

138 *ibid.*



The waste paper campaign for the war effort from 1940 was both national and far-reaching. It galvanised action in Victoria by historians and the Public Library to protect archives.

Australian War Memorial, neg. 137021.

At Beechworth Court House, briefs linking themselves to Ned Kelly were noticed. He appeared on multiple charges, according to the briefs ... It was submitted no jury in the district would send him up for sentence, and the case was adjourned to Melbourne. An old lag assisting the collectors found briefs of a gold stealing case at Bendigo, which involved him in three years imprisonment.¹³⁹

The next day, the Melbourne *Sun News-Pictorial* repeated the Ballarat story, while *The Herald* ran a story on 'Waste Paper Being Wasted', reporting that 'municipalities and shires in the country are being asked by the State Controller of Salvageto authorize campaigns to extend the work'.¹⁴⁰

At about the same time, Gwyn James, then a lecturer in History at the University of Melbourne, discovered that some records from small court houses in the Maryborough area—including those of Maryborough, Dunolly, Bealiba and Avoca—had been taken by Austral Waste Products.¹⁴¹ Professor Max Crawford, acting on this advice, wrote immediately on 11 September to Chief Librarian Ernest Pitt, who quickly arranged a meeting on 17 September. Held in the Board Room of the Public Library, this meeting involved the Hon. WH Edgar, MLC, Crawford and James from the University of Melbourne, and three Library representatives. These participants passed a historic resolution:

That this meeting ask the Premier to take steps to prevent any further destruction of official documents; that local government bodies be asked to preserve their records.¹⁴²

Edgar was asked to convey this message to the Premier and to seek a meeting between him and Dr McKeddie,¹⁴³ Professor Crawford, Messrs Kenyon, James, Latham, McMicken¹⁴⁴ and Pitt. This follow-up meeting indeed took place, at 12 noon on 30 October, at the Chief Secretary's office in Spring Street.¹⁴⁵ Another result of the Library meeting was that Pitt wrote the following day to the

139 *Ballarat Courier*, 4 September 1940, p. 4.

140 *The Herald*, 6 September 1940, p. 5.

141 James was actively researching in Maryborough at this time. His version of the journal of Maryborough pioneer Alfred Joyce, *A Homestead History*, first appeared in 1942. In 1975 James returned to the archives as Deputy Keeper of Public Records.

142 Papers from Public Library Victoria file, VPRS 5716/P1.

143 Then Chairman of the Public Library Trustees.

144 Alfred McMicken (1872–1964), a Public Library Trustee, was also City Librarian of Prahran 1907–39.

145 Papers from Public Library of Victoria file, VPRS 5716/P1.

Secretary of the Law Department, asking that the court house records be held for inspection before pulping, in accordance with the 1937 Premier's Instruction. The Secretary acceded. A few days later, Pitt penned a note to Ida Leeson, the Mitchell Librarian in Sydney, who had been following the affair, advising that he was 'glad to say that we have been able to salvage some of the court house documents, and have arranged to inspect others as they arrive at the waste paper depot'.¹⁴⁶ Thus it was that the vigilance of James, and the speedy actions of Crawford, Pitt and Edgar, transformed a critical threat to Victoria's archives into an opportunity to strike out on a new path leading inexorably towards the formal establishment of a Victorian Archives.

For Professor Crawford, these events held lasting meaning. At the end of his career, Crawford was invited to attend an Honours seminar conducted by Noel McLachlan in the School of History. Patricia Grimshaw recalled that Crawford had two things to convey: first, an explanation to the students as to why he had written so little, and second, an assertion that he had made a major contribution to Australian history.

He felt the thing he had done that was really important was to say that it was important that documents were to be retrieved. He told them incredible stories of how he had quite heroically stopped truckloads of documents being sent to the tip, and had stressed their importance and established the notion that they must be archived and that future historians would rely on them.¹⁴⁷

To this comment, Alison Patrick added: 'His impact on records is true. There was this extended expedition saving half the court records of Victoria from being pulped. I was a student then, and he and Norman [Harper] went out and did that. They saved a lot of other stuff too.'¹⁴⁸ Clearly it was an important moment for those who participated in this campaign, though the claim that they saved 'half the court records of Victoria' is somewhat exaggerated.

Despite the fact that Austral Waste Products provided full access and co-operation on three visits made by University and Library staff members, very few court records were saved once they reached the pulp mills. James explained the reasons for this limited success in an *Age* article later in 1940:

146 *ibid.*

147 Contribution by Patricia Grimshaw, in S Macintyre & P McPhee, *Max Crawford's School of History*, p. 52.

148 Contribution by Alison Patrick, *ibid.*

The bales are heavy; they stand in a large stack amid other materials in similar bags, they are not labeled and their contents were thrown in indiscriminately. Blank forms by the dozen, routine notice sheets, old 'Government Gazettes' and so on occupy by far the greatest space. But here and there, there are valuable records ...

Three searches yielded the following: a judge's notebook, from the Dunolly County Court, covering the years 1869–85, an entry book of the Goldfields Commissioners, listing consignments for escort deposited at the Dunolly gold office 1856–67; a depositions book for the court at Moliagul 1856–7; three deposition books for Dunolly 1857–62 and 1866–71; a deposition book of the Warden's Court, Dunolly, 1863–9, two of the Dunolly Warden's Letter books 1865–71.¹⁴⁹

Few of the small number of registers mentioned above as being retrieved by James have reached Public Record Office Victoria. Among those that have, two bear markings indicating that they were held for a time in the collection of the late Dr Edwin (Ted) Semmens, a Creswick historian and long-time Principal of the School of Forestry in Creswick.¹⁵⁰ Other records from the nine volumes saved are with the Semmens Collection, now held at Melbourne University Archives. Although Crawford and James sought the assistance of Pitt in making recommendations to government that would slow the salvage process, they did not always see to it that records thus saved passed to the Public Library.

One conclusion that must be drawn is that, despite the best efforts of James, Crawford and Pitt, few records were actually saved in September 1940. Support for this is lent by evidence surviving on a Chief Secretary's Office file. There, notes detail comments made by Crawford and James to the Chief Secretary at the 30 October meeting. According to Crawford:

Although officers of the Public Library and the History Department of the University had received very great co-operation from the company, it had been found that ... the sorting out of documents of historical importance had become almost an impossibility, owing to the papers being tied up in heavy bundles and sacks.

149 *The Age*, 7 December 1940, p. 5.

150 Dr Edwin James (Ted) Semmens (b. 1886), MBE, Principal of the Creswick School of Forestry from 1927, developed an extensive historical collection, now in the University of Melbourne Archives. The two volumes at PROV, with markings indicating their inclusion in the Semmens Collection, are VPRS 6141/P0 and VPRS 6143/P0.



These two registers, saved by historian Gwyn James from the pulp mills at Abbotsford late in 1940, eventually reached Public Record Office Victoria in the 1980s after spending periods in the Semmens Collection at Creswick and at Melbourne University Archives. They appear to be the only records at PROV saved by the intervention against wartime pulping.

PROV, VPRS 6141/P0; PROV, VPRS 6143/P0.

In the same vein, James told the meeting that ‘he had paid three visits to the waste paper mills in an endeavour to sort out what remained of certain court house records from country districts, but ... had found it impossible to do so’.¹⁵¹

While the historians did make a significant contribution in 1940, it seems that this was achieved by raising the issue of archives before government, and perhaps by supporting the idea of an archival term of reference being given to the Pitt Inquiry, rather than by actually ‘saving records’ or ‘stopping trucks’. The legend of what took place receives little support from the records.

Salvage activities continued during the war, with administrative responsibility being transferred to the Commonwealth Salvage Committee in October 1943, at the request of the Prime Minister, John Curtin. While it is likely that this program had some impact on state and local government record holdings, no clear evidence exists as to the precise nature of such impact.¹⁵²

On 30 September 1940, a significant step was taken towards the eventual provision of archival legislation in Victoria. The government appointed a Board of Inquiry to examine free library services available to the public. There were five Board members: Ernest Pitt, as Chairman, Colin Badger,¹⁵³ William Baud, Kenneth Cunningham¹⁵⁴ and Alfred McMicken. Since Pitt had undertaken a review of departmental records twelve years earlier, and Baud had assisted him with this project, both had substantial and long-standing knowledge of archives. The inquiry focused mainly on public and municipal library services across the state, and its deliberations dragged on, with eighty-one hearings. A Final Report was produced in 1944. Although archives played a very minor role in these proceedings, the Committee did recommend archival legislation and staff.

The year 1940 also saw transfers of additional Criminal Trial Briefs (1901–19) from the Law Department as well as Castlemaine mining records. Geelong police office records,¹⁵⁵ which had been inspected by Colin McCallum in February 1938 and transferred in that year, were also reported in 1940.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, limited advocacy for the creation of an archives capacity continued. On 22 July 1941, the Hon. WH Edgar, MLC, asked a two-part question in Parliament. Part (a) enquired

151 Chief Secretary’s Office, file 40U/9058, VPRS 3992/P0.

152 Premier’s Department, file P43/2774, VPRS 1163/P0.

153 Later Director of the Council of Adult Education, Victoria.

154 Dr Kenneth Cunningham, Public Library Trustee and Director of the Council for Educational Research 1930–54.

155 Public Library Annual Report 1940, p. 28, VPRS 805/P0.

156 Public Library outwards correspondence, letter nos 209, 230 and 325, VPRS 802/P0.

whether the government would consider the appointment of a full-time archives officer. The reply was that it would not, at the present time, with ‘essential expenditure in connection with the war effort of the state taking precedence.’ Part (b) of the question asked: ‘Does the government consider the present method of dealing with such documents and records to be adequate?’ The draft answer to this question was ‘NO’, but it was deleted and a penciled alternative substituted: ‘Undoubtedly some improvement in the present method could be effected.’¹⁵⁷ Edgar continued to lobby on archival matters. In 1941, he wrote to the Chief Secretary advocating the appointment of an archivist.¹⁵⁸ On 29 October and 12 November 1942, again writing to the Chief Secretary, he sought a meeting for a deputation consisting of the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Councillor Nettlefold, Justice Lowe,¹⁵⁹ Sir Keith Murdoch,¹⁶⁰ Dr JE McKeddie,¹⁶¹ Herbert McComb¹⁶² and, additionally for the latter attempt, Dr Wettenhall, President of the Genealogical Society.¹⁶³

In August 1942, Alfred McMicken, then Secretary of the Library Association of Australia as well as a Library Trustee, put a motion before the Trustees calling for the establishment of an Archives Department.¹⁶⁴ Following a resolution unanimously adopted at the Association’s Annual Meeting, a letter was written to the Premier on 17 September, urging the creation of a position of archivist at the Public Library. In the letter, the Association drew attention to ‘the successful archivist’s department being carried on in South Australia’ and indicated its view that ‘the importance of this state warrants a like venture’.¹⁶⁵

In 1942, consideration was also given to a proposal from the Hon. WH Edgar that an archivist be appointed in an honorary capacity. While the Trustees decided not to proceed with this proposal, they ‘recommended that an Archives Department be established in the Public Library as soon as man-power conditions permit’.¹⁶⁶

157 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P41/1387 on file P62/2446, VPRS 1163/P0.

158 Public Library Annual Report 1941, p. 23.

159 Later Sir Charles Lowe, Chancellor of the University of Melbourne and Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

160 Sir Keith Murdoch (1886–1952), legendary newsman, President of the Public Library Trustees 1939–45.

161 Chairman of the Public Library Books Committee.

162 Herbert Spencer McComb (1897–?), Chief Surveyor of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board, President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria 1942–48.

163 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P42/3309 on file P62/2446, VPRS 1163/P0.

164 Public Library inwards correspondence, 40/826, VPRS 5716/P1.

165 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P42/2915 on file P62/2448, VPRS 1163/P0.

166 Public Library Annual Report 1942, p. 34.

The outbreak of World War II put on the agenda another important issue—that of protecting vital records. If such records were threatened, what should be done? Three main responses emerged: microfilm; removal of vital records to safe remote storage; or reliance on the strength of the buildings in which the records were stored.

The State Taxation Commissioner, RW Chenoweth, felt that the structure of his new concrete building at 436 Lonsdale Street provided the best protection: ‘The Taxation building is of reinforced concrete ... a first class building in regard to risk from bombing ... The movement of essential records to a safe area would cause a serious dislocation in the performance of the duties of this office and is not recommended.’¹⁶⁷

However, Oswald Gawler, the Government Statist, took a different view. He informed the Under-Secretary, on 12 February 1941, that if the Statist’s Office were destroyed, the only official records of births and deaths left in Victoria would be local ones held by registrars outside the metropolitan area. Meanwhile at the main office in Melbourne, accumulating records—duplicates from country registrars’ offices that had closed, suburban registrars’ records, and duplicate volumes of all registrations held by the metropolitan registration branch—were vulnerable. The Statist considered these should be removed ‘to a fireproof floor in some government building in Melbourne’, or ‘if as a special war precaution it is thought desirable to remove the duplicates from Melbourne, temporary storage in, say, Ballarat would be a wise precaution’.¹⁶⁸ The Secretary to the Premier responded by seeking a report from Public Works as to ‘space available in safe areas’. When Public Works in turn asked what space was needed, the Premier’s Department surveyed departments regarding their requirements. This occurred in March 1941.

Another initiative of the Premier’s Department was to obtain information in June 1941 from Herschell’s Motion Picture Laboratories Pty Ltd of 31 Agnes Street, East Melbourne, concerning the microfilming of vital documents. Herschell’s advised that an operator could make between 1,200 and 2,000 pictures per day, and that these would be stored in units of 5,000 in a circular tin seven inches in diameter. Eric Porter Studios of Sydney also offered to undertake such a project, asserting that ‘up to date we are the only firm who has actually done work of this kind’.¹⁶⁹ Both

167 RW Chenoweth, Taxation Commissioner to [Sir] Arthur T Smithers, Director of Finance, 21 April 1941, Treasury inwards correspondence, file 41R/953, VPRS 1207/P1.

168 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P41/320 on file P44/2482, VPRS 1163/P0.

169 Premier’s inwards correspondence, P41/1127 on file P44/2482, VPRS 1163/P0.



Responding in 1941 to the threat to records posed by bombing, State Taxation Commissioner RW Chenoweth told Director of Finance Sir Arthur Smithers that his new concrete building at 436 Lonsdale Street was 'a first class building in regard to risk from bombing'. Fortunately this theory has never been tested.

Photograph by Jo Bradley.

Herschell's and Porter Studios enclosed samples of their work, which remain on file. On 19 August 1941, in a further circular, the Premier's Department sought estimates of the number of documents each department might need to microfilm. While many agencies—including the Stamp Duties Office, the Tender Board and the Housing Commission¹⁷⁰—reported that they had no irreplaceable records, some took action.

The Titles Office chose the remote storage option and, after considering both Omeo and Beechworth as potential safe sites, decided upon the latter. This was despite reservations from the Clerk of Courts at Beechworth, who suggested that 'the town's close proximity to vulnerable areas renders it liable to attack'. These vulnerable areas included the Benalla Royal Australian Air Force Base, the Wangaratta Army Camp, the Myrtleford Prisoner of War Camp, the State Electricity Commission hydro-electric scheme, and the Albury rail junction. Furthermore, there was the possibility that the many buildings servicing the needs of the mental hospital and tannery might suggest an industrial centre of some importance.¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, the Titles Office operation at Beechworth commenced in April 1942, with office accommodation for staff being provided at the Mining Registrar's Office, and ten cells of Beechworth Gaol being used for plan presses and a searcher's room.

Similarly, the Melbourne Harbour Trust established an arrangement with the Bank of Australasia to store records at its Euroa Branch.¹⁷² There the Trust stored both microfilmed and hard copy 'essential records' from July 1942, with most of them staying until September 1946. However, a small quantity of inscribed stock records remained there until 1977, when they were moved to a branch of the successor ANZ Bank in Melbourne.¹⁷³

The number of archival transfers to the Public Library during the war years was very small. Those records which did arrive came from the Beechworth Mining Registrar, the Castlemaine Mining Board, the Geelong Police Office, and the Chief Secretary's Office—with the latter sending a further decade of materials.¹⁷⁴ It is possible that the Beechworth Mining Registrar's records were transferred in consequence of their former office's being used by the Titles Office.

170 Treasury inwards correspondence, file 43R/1050, VPRS 1207/P1.

171 Clerk of Courts, Beechworth, to ES Vance, Registrar of Titles, 26 March 1942, Law Department file 48/7834.

172 Report of the Melbourne Harbour Trust Commissioners, 1942, p. 35.

173 Melbourne Harbour Trust, general subject correspondence file, safe deposit, VPRS 7972/P1.

174 Public Library Annual Report 1943, pp. 25–7.



Microfilming was another response to wartime threats to vital records. This flier from Herschell's Pty Ltd illustrates how microfilming was being marketed in 1941.

PROV, VPRS 1163/P0.



Another wartime means of protecting vital records was remote storage. The Melbourne Harbour Trust moved some of its records to this branch of the Bank of Australasia in Euroa, where some of them were still to be found as late as 1977.

Reproduced with the permission of Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited.

As to microfilming, there were various heroic initiatives. The Titles Office went ahead using a Graflex camera borrowed from the Public Library, but the Registrar, Eric Vance, colourfully stressed the enormity of the task:

When one considers Titles Office records one has to think of at least fifty sections of documents all of considerable and some of tremendous magnitude; to think, not in terms of thousands but of millions of documents; not of a few dozen but of thousands of huge record books, not of a few hundred bags of titles but of twenty five thousand ... not of a ton but of tens of tons weight of documents, and not of a few hundred feet of shelving, but of thousands of feet, even miles.¹⁷⁵

By August 1942, the Titles Office had some 550 reels of microfilm ready for transfer to Beechworth, where their wartime storage arrangements were maintained until October 1948. By then, the last of their remaining films and furniture were finally returned to Melbourne.

The Board of Inquiry into Library Services under Pitt's chairmanship submitted its Final Report in 1944. In the report, in a short section discussing additional services that the Public Library should provide, the Board discussed the need for an Archives Department. It found that 'the Public Library of Victoria has been for many years the repository of official documents from state departments'. It also noted that while instructions had been issued forbidding the destruction of records without notification to the Library Trustees, these requirements lacked the legislative backing given to similar provisions in other states. The Board considered that it would probably be expedient to place the Archives Department under the control of the Public Library. It further considered that a State Libraries Board should be set up to prepare legislation ensuring the collection and preservation of public records. In an Appendix, the Board recommended the appointment of three archivists to staff the function.¹⁷⁶

Perhaps these recommendations were ahead of their time. Among the various community responses to the report kept on file by the Chief Secretary's Office, only one respondent made reference to the proposals concerning archives. The Parliamentary Librarian, in his comments dated 9 March 1945, observed that 'this important matter received little attention in the report'. He then

175 Eric S Vance, Registrar of Titles to the Secretary to the Law Department, 12 February 1942, Law Department file 48/7834.

176 Board of Inquiry into Library Services, VPRS 2930/P0.



During World War II, the Titles Office protected its vital records by establishing a branch in Beechworth. From 1942 until 1948, hundreds of cans of microfilm were stored in cells at the Gaol (rear of picture), while an officer worked in the Mining Registrar's Office (second cottage from left). Meanwhile, the Mining Registrar's records were transferred to the Public Library.

From the permanent collection of the
Burke Museum.

questioned whether the Public Library would be ‘central enough for Departments’, pointing to the position of the Public Records Office in London: ‘[It] is a singularly successful institution and is a separate one.’ The Parliamentary Librarian felt that ‘something of this sort should be set up for the whole of Australia, with branches in the State Capitals. It is a sphere in which Commonwealth and State could co-operate more easily than in others.’ Not only did no other respondent allude to this matter, but surprisingly, notes of a deputation to the Chief Secretary from the Library Association of Victoria, dated 9 February 1945, similarly fail to mention archives. This despite the fact that the deputation was led by RH Croll,¹⁷⁷ Alfred McMicken, Ernest Pitt and Leigh Scott.¹⁷⁸

The Board of Inquiry’s recommendations did, however, lead to two streams of activity—organisational and legislative. And the latter led ultimately to the passage in December 1944 of the *Public Library, National Gallery and Museums Act 1944*.

Meanwhile in May 1944, the Parliamentary Library Committee wrote to the Premier about what it saw as ‘the need for better provision being made for the custody and preservation of archives in Victoria’. This led to a meeting on 29 June between the Hon. GH Knox,¹⁷⁹ MLC, and Premier Albert Dunstan.¹⁸⁰ On the same day, the Premier publicly announced that his government was indeed considering a plan for the preservation of the historical records of the state. This in turn led to representations from the Society of Australian Genealogists in Sydney and the Historical Society of Victoria.¹⁸¹

The final draft of the Public Library, National Gallery and Museums Bill, dated 1944, made no reference to archives. But one of the Bill’s four drafts (not the Cabinet version) had included the archival powers recommended by the Board of Inquiry. While these amendments had had the support of the Chief Librarian and the Under-Secretary of the Chief Secretary’s Department, LL Chapman, they were opposed by the Parliamentary Draftsman, RC Normand. According to Normand, ‘the trustees of the Public Library do not need a special power to acquire documents of

177 Robert Henderson Croll, poet, Australianist and bush walker.

178 Chief Secretary’s Office inwards correspondence, 45/E1256 on file 1946/H5992, VPRS 4723/P0.

179 Later Sir George Knox, CMG.

180 Albert Arthur Dunstan, a Country Party Premier whose minority government depended on Labor support.

181 Chief Secretary’s Office, file P44/2482, VPRS 1163/P0.



Following the Board of Inquiry into Library Services chaired by Ernest Pitt, an archival power was nearly inserted into the ensuing Public Library, National Gallery and Museums Bill, dated 1944. The provision was excluded on the advice of Parliamentary Draftsman RC Normand, who claimed it was unnecessary. Victoria then had to wait many years before archival legislation was passed.

PROV, VPRS 10265/P0.

historical value from public departments and other public authorities, any more than they need a special power to purchase books'.¹⁸² This view prevailed, and when the final draft went to Cabinet early in December 1944, the notion had been dropped.

The second strand of activity arising from the 1944 Board of Inquiry, the appointment of archival staff, was eventually acted upon in 1948 with the appointment of DWA Baker as Archivist.

The Historical Society of Victoria and the Archives Collection of the Public Library of Victoria were formed at the beginning of the twentieth century through the vision of a relatively small group of men in their thirties. These men were to sustain and develop both initiatives throughout their lifetimes. All were believers in the vision of a State Records Office, based on that in London. All understood that it would be important for the understanding and writing of Australian history that such a body be created. All passed away within a decade of each other: Harrison Moore in 1935, Ernest Scott in 1939, AS Kenyon and Alfred Greig in 1944, and Edmund Armstrong in 1946. Among Armstrong's last written words in 1945 were these:

The establishment of a Records Office has become essential. Whether that office should be connected with the Public Library is at least doubtful.¹⁸³

By this time, thirty-five years had been devoted to building the Archives Collection of the Public Library and to advocacy for a State Records Office. Another twenty-eight years remained before the idea would become the subject of legislation, and fully fifty-five years before the vision would be realised completely. Only then would there be a purpose-built central archives facility with the staff and technical capacity to fulfil its function professionally. In this sense, it has taken three generations of effort to create Public Record Office Victoria as it exists today. But it is a tribute to Ernest Scott and his determined colleagues that, a century after the first transfer of records, the Office differs so little from their original conception of what it might be.

182 Normand to Chapman, 17 November 1944, unregistered item on Chief Secretary's Office file 46/F5759, VPRS 3992/P0.

183 Armstrong, 'Fifty Years of the Public Library ...', page 13b.



The stunning architecture of the purpose-built Victorian Archives Building in Shiel Street, North Melbourne—the culmination of a century of struggle and development.

Photograph by Jo Bradley.

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