



Private and presentation albums can yield rare insights into the technology and condition of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century workplaces. These undated photographs of the interior of a printery are from the collection of the Printing and Kindred Industries Union, Adelaide.

ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

CHAPTER 2

ARCHIVES

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IT IS NOT EASY to define archives: the word is used both for the institution and for the records it holds. The terminology presents no difficulties while we are dealing with traditional archival institutions, which form a specialised part of the organisation whose records they keep. Among these are government archives, university archives and the archives of private organisations such as banks and large corporations. Difficulties arise when we have to deal with collecting institutions, established because of our increasing concern that original historical material should be preserved for research use. Some of these bodies are called archives and some are not, but all apply archival principles to their holdings and are likely to have in their custody the archives of a number of organisations or individuals as well as other original records.

To complicate matters further, a recent innovation is to employ the singular word, 'archive', to describe a specialised collection of material in a particular form (such as film, sound recording or computer tape) or related to a particular subject area. When we add to this the tendency to make a neat division between published and unpublished material, placing archives in the latter category, it will be understood that there are problems in giving a clear definition. In fact, not all archives consist of unpublished material, nor are all collections of original or unpublished material properly described as archives.

Any organisation, large or small, creates records in the course of its operations. These records will of course vary: some will be of temporary value only and may be destroyed when they are no longer needed; others will be kept, either because they contain evidence of legal or property transactions, or because they record matters of administrative or historical importance to the organisation. Such records become archives and any organisation of standing is likely to have some arrangement for preserving its older records. Material transferred to this area—itsself usually referred to as 'the archives'—is certainly not confined to written records; any document, including a printed work or object which has some significance to the operations may legitimately form part of the archives.

Archives existed long before libraries or museums, as is clear from archaeological finds such as clay tablets bearing information stored away by ancient rulers or administrators. The great empires of antiquity also maintained archives, which were dispersed or destroyed as they fell to invaders. Most European archives were founded to care for surviving ancient and mediaeval documents, and for a long time the training of archivists involved the teaching of skills needed to understand such documents, such as mediaeval Latin, abbreviations and the study of seals.

The beginnings of modern archival theory are attributed to a French revolutionary decree of 1794, which opened the archives to public scrutiny as part of the attack on hereditary privileges and land rights. This necessitated the development of systems of arrangement and control, and produced the basic principle of *respect des fonds*, which means that documents should be kept together in terms of their provenance. The concept of provenance includes when and why the records were created and their subsequent location and ownership. It also means that records created by a corporate body are always linked with that body, even if they have subsequently been inherited by another body, irrespective of changing national boundaries and the consequent transfer from one nation to another of certain legal and administrative records.

Related to this is the principle that the original order of the records be maintained—that is, they should as far as possible be kept as they were in the office that created them. The context of the information contained in the documents can be as important as the information itself for a historical understanding of the event or transaction.

Scholars often find that records kept by a body for its own use contain unvarnished facts, or at least the contemporary perception of what the facts were, and that they contain a low incidence of distortion for ulterior motives. This is what makes archives a prime source of historical information, even if only to check the veracity or probability of more detailed and colourful personal accounts of events.

A major distinction between public and private archival records is that the records of government are subject to legislation covering their public availability, while private records, whether of huge corporations or of individuals, remain private property. In Australia today there is a variety of legislation covering the management and accessibility of government records and an even greater variety of institutions holding private archives and manuscripts.

PUBLIC RECORDS

The records of government provide extensive sources for Australian studies. Australia has eight separate legislatures, each with an independent administrative structure, and an extensive network of local government in every state. Settlement in Australia was from the beginning a government enterprise, dominated by public administrators even before Governor Phillip set sail with the first fleet. Practically every facet of colonial life was controlled, encouraged, regulated or subsidised by government.

The availability of public records to anyone who wishes to carry out research into early history or to compile a family tree is a fairly recent development. Not so long ago, convict records were firmly restricted from public access and Australian historians were forced to travel to London to do their basic research.

That so many early records have survived—such as the remarkably intact correspondence of the Colonial Secretary's Office in New South Wales from 1826 on—cannot be attributed to any realisation by nineteenth-century officials that posterity would find them useful for historical research. It is rather that the records constitute an organisation's corporate memory, and the administrators are naturally inclined to preserve the memory for possible future use. Even in today's offices, the secondary storage area for retired files is referred to as the archives and old records are retrieved from this area regularly. It is safe to assume that the colonial records were kept for their own sake, and that by the time the public was beginning to demand access to historical records, older government bodies were suffering from the twin problems of storage and disposal. The functions of modern government archives are heavily weighted towards both activities: the provision of efficient low-cost storage and the regular disposal of temporary records.

The few older records that had been made accessible before World War II were normally placed in the custody of the state libraries, which were already pursuing active policies of collecting, by donation or purchase, significant historical documents, personal papers and Australiana. Legislation passed during the war years recognised the *de facto* control of public archives by state library boards and enabled the establishment of an archives section in the library.

The librarians who were appointed as custodians of the archives had to educate themselves in the theory and practice of archives management. It took almost a generation to convince governments that the functions of archives were essentially different from those of libraries and that archival authorities would be better removed from library control. The major function that sets archives apart from libraries is that of records disposal—the continual need to decide which to keep and which to destroy, knowing that retention takes space and that destruction is irreversible. The increasing importance of regulated disposal of government records has been a major factor in the passage of recent archival legislation.

ARCHIVES LEGISLATION

Since the Northern Territory set up its archives in 1982, each of the eight Australian governments has an archival authority. In some states, legislation preceded the establishment of an archives; in others the institution effectively existed before it was given a statutory basis.

The details of the origins and provision of archival legislation in Australia are complex and technical. Here it will suffice to note that South Australia was the first state to pass an appropriate act in 1925, while the most recent legislation in this field was passed in Victoria in 1973. All the acts have been revised from time to time and have taken note of legislation at commonwealth level and in the other states.

The commonwealth established the Australian Archives, a successor to the Commonwealth Archives Office, as an autonomous authority in 1961 when it ceased to be part of the newly constituted National Library. Originally based in Canberra, it gradually established regional offices in all state capitals and in Darwin and Townsville to handle records generated by commonwealth bodies. The commonwealth Archives Act, passed in 1983, is the most comprehensive piece of archival legislation yet passed in Australia and will probably affect all future state legislation. It not only gives the Australian Archives the power to prevent destruction of records, but makes destruction or alteration not authorised by the archives an offence carrying a heavy fine. The major innovation is, however, that the act confers on the public a statutory right of access to commonwealth archives, backed up with legal avenues of appeal against denial of access.

It is worth noting that the Archives Act was drafted in conjunction with commonwealth freedom of information legislation and the two acts contain similar grounds for exempting documents and similar avenues of appeal. All commonwealth records over 30 years old are subject to the provisions of the Archives Act and eventually all documents less than 30 years old will fall within the scope of the Freedom of Information Act, thus providing a total coverage of public access to commonwealth records and sources of information.

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

Public records comprise not only the unpublished material accumulated in government offices which we commonly regard as archives, but also the whole range of publications issued by government authorities and departments. Because government publications are usually found in libraries, there is a tendency not to regard them as archives at all. Nevertheless, they are just as much records of the administrative process as are unpublished materials.

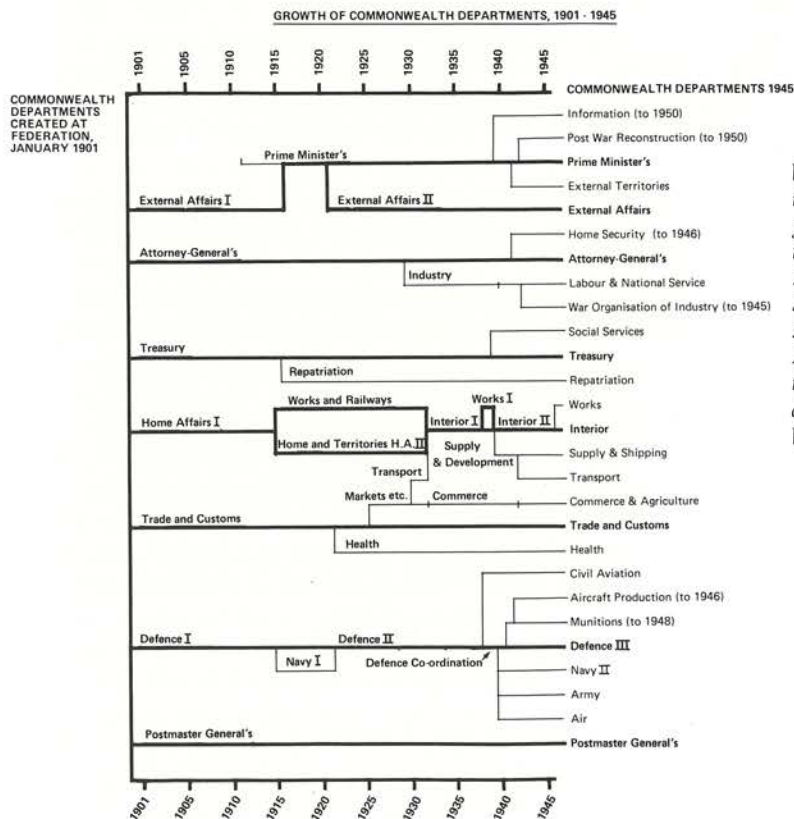
The principal function of a state or national archives is to preserve a record of the activities of government, and in this capacity it should hold master sets of every government publication. No clear distinction can be drawn between administrative processes and their products. The researcher interested in historical records should therefore be aware not only that government publications are to be found among the archives, but also that it would be wise to seek out published official sources as well as old files, since they may well carry different parts of the story.

The published records of parliament are a particularly important source, because a considerable amount of government activity is connected with matters that go before parliament. As well as the formal record of proceedings kept by every house of parliament (such as the *Votes and proceedings* of the House of Representatives and the *Journals* of the Senate, and corresponding

documents in the state legislatures), which yields information on when bills were introduced and abandoned, what was debated in each sitting and which documents were tabled, there are full transcripts of parliamentary debates commonly known as Hansard. These are brought out daily, weekly and monthly during each session, and eventually bound and indexed as a permanent record. Equally useful, from an archival viewpoint, are the parliamentary papers, consisting of all reports formally presented to parliament and numerous other documents tabled in the house during the course of its business.

The process of government is continuous and its structures do not remain static. Every time ministerial portfolios are rearranged, administrative functions are passed from one department to another. Simultaneously all the records concerning that function, past or present, are transferred into the control of the successor department. This fact has governed the development of archival control systems, which must be able to record changing ownership. Users must always remember that archives are retrieved by provenance and function, not by subject. In order to find archival information on a given subject, one must first be able to link that subject with a function of government; then one must link the function to a ministry and track down which agency within that ministry was actually responsible for it. This should lead to a series of files, and further scanning of an original index or archival list should locate a relevant file.

It is important that researchers begin with some understanding of the administrative structures of government and how its functions are carried out, since ministries change their names and responsibilities all too frequently over time. The easiest way to obtain such understanding is through official publications, principally government gazettes. Whenever functions, names or responsibilities are altered, the government publishes a formal notification of the changes in its regular gazette. From time to time, these administrative arrangement orders are published in a consolidated form, setting out the acts administered by each ministerial portfolio and all the major functions for which it is responsible.



When the Commonwealth was formed in January 1901, there were seven government departments. By 1945 there were twenty-seven, about the same number as there are in the 1980s. Some idea of administrative change is shown by the lines stemming from Home affairs I. The heavy lines show the continuation of the original seven departments into the period after World War II.

More detailed information about the functions and responsibilities of government departments or agencies is likely to be found in annual reports, which are usually included in the parliamentary papers as well as being published separately by some departments. Internal reorganisations of departments are not usually gazetted, although they can have considerable effects on record series, but sometimes departments produce charts showing their organisational structure. It has been customary for governments to produce a regular directory listing all their agencies, but these are not always detailed enough to show functional responsibilities and are sometimes not accurately updated.

A useful guide to the relationship between government administration and official documents is D.H. Borchardt's *Australian official publications* (Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1979). Although no longer up to date in all its detail—changes in governments have played havoc with ministerial responsibilities—it is still the only thorough survey of this important topic. Of immense assistance to future researchers are the provisions of the commonwealth Freedom of Information Act 1982, which makes it mandatory for all agencies to publish in the *Commonwealth directory* detailed statements of their functions and the types of records they create and use.

Australian governments have since earliest times been inordinately fond of establishing royal commissions and committees of inquiry as a means of obtaining an independent view of social and political issues. The published reports and transcripts of evidence of such tribunals are prime historical sources. It is fortunate that this group of documents is among the few that have been indexed fairly thoroughly in the *Checklist of royal commissions, select committees of parliament and boards of inquiry* compiled by D.H. Borchardt for the commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria, and by E. Zalums for South Australia and Western Australia. After a lapse of 30 years, the records of commissions usually become accessible to the public, including hitherto unpublished sections of reports and transcripts, submissions and working files.

ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES

Archives are never freely accessible in the way we expect books to be in a library. Since the original records are irreplaceable, they must be protected against careless handling, theft or excessive wear and tear. Normally, documents can be consulted only under supervision, and it is the general practice to issue researchers with special passes and to make them sign a receipt for each item they receive. Documents in fragile condition or poor repair may be withheld from reference use, although it is likely, especially in the case of records frequently in demand, that copies will be provided in some form. Within these limitations, it is generally accepted in Australia that government records are equally accessible to all, and that distinctions will not be made on the grounds of age, nationality, purpose of research or educational qualifications.

Acceptance of such principles is fairly recent. Until a couple of decades ago, governments were inclined to restrict access to their records to reputable scholars—at least until the records had become truly 'historical' by the passage of time. A 50-year closed access period was eventually introduced in Australia, quite some time after it had become the norm in Britain. When the British government decided, from 1968 on, not only to reduce the closed access period to 30 years but also to release the hitherto sacrosanct records of cabinet, it was only a matter of time before Australian governments followed suit.

Bureaucratic fears about the possible effect of opening up their secrets to the public proved to be exaggerated when the freedom of information and archives legislation of 1982–83 revealed how few skeletons were hidden in bureaucratic basements. There is nevertheless some justified concern about the nature of the documents which might be released after only 30 years—which is after all little more than half a lifetime. Archival records contain information which could prove distressing or defamatory to people—and not only to politicians or to public servants. The commonwealth Archives Act protects the commonwealth and its officers from defamation suits which could arise out of the release of documents, as well as providing grounds for the exemption of information about a person if its disclosure would be unreasonable.

Files of an obviously personal nature, such as medical or social security records, are clearly not

suitable for public release while their subjects are alive or their descendants likely to be affected. But information also occurs on general administrative files which it would be unfair or unkind to make public too soon—such as untried allegations of criminal offences, references to treatment for social diseases and descriptions of wartime atrocities committed on named service personnel and unknown to their close relatives. Sometimes, of course, the public interest in having all relevant facts of a case may outweigh considerations of personal distress, but there is a great deal of information in government records about ordinary people, whose doings have no bearing on the public interest.

Governments also have a duty to protect certain information in their records, on the grounds that it would be irresponsible or internationally damaging to make it public. The release of government archives therefore always entails some kind of screening operation, whether this is done in government departments or in the archives.

The commonwealth Archives Act, which gives the public statutory right of access to records, also sets out the broad categories of information that might need to be exempted from access. These have not changed greatly in substance from the rules in operation before the passage of the act.

GUIDES AND FINDING AIDS

There is no general guide to the holdings of government archives in Australia, and only a few guides to any archival records have been published. Government archives generally make available to the public finding aids which they have created for their own internal use. The Archives Office of New South Wales and the Public Record Office of Victoria have produced, and continue to update by regular supplements, comprehensive published guides to their holdings. Those interested should address enquiries to these authorities because detailed citations of their published guides are quickly outdated.

In describing archives, it is always necessary to deal with the whole as well as with the constituent parts; this in turn dictates the form of the finding aids. Control and description of the records is established at various levels: by group, comprising all the records of a particular department; by function, such as naturalisation, where the records have passed not only through numerous different departments but between governments; by series, comprising all the records kept in a similar system (the basic level of archival control); and by item, the individual file or document. Archivists themselves need finding aids at all these levels in order to maintain basic controls. Such inventories should list and describe every item in each series. As an interim measure, draft or preliminary inventories were compiled up to the mid-1960s, notably by state archives in Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia, where they normally covered colonial records. The same format provided the earlier parts of the *New South Wales Guide* and was in use by the then Commonwealth Archives Office.

The main public finding aid to commonwealth archives, formerly known as the *Summary guide* and now called ANGAM (Australian national guide to archival material), consisted until 1984 of a large set of binders containing selected documentation arranged numerically by the alphanumeric symbols given to commonwealth agencies. It was never issued in printed form and is now held on microfilm; however, it contains no subject index and very little information on the subject coverage of records, which makes it rather daunting for most researchers.

The passage of the Archives Act in 1983 made the establishment and maintenance of a National Register of Records a duty for the Australian Archives. Neither the format nor the content of the register is specified in the act, but it is likely to be maintained as a computerised data base. It should replace the unwieldy *Summary guide* as an Australian Archives finding aid, and may even provide data for published guides to records arranged by agency or by subject.

All archives institutions are aware of the need for subject-related guides to assist public use of their records, and some attempts have been made to provide these in areas of known high research interest, such as family history. A few guides, lists or indexes have been compiled privately with the assistance of groups or institutions with an interest in particular subject areas,

such as women's history, film history, architectural history and Aborigines. In 1983 the Australian Society of Archivists published a directory to archival institutions in Australia, entitled *Our heritage*, which provides general information on most public and many private institutions. Further details on this and related guides to manuscript and archives collection will be found in chapter 8 of this volume. For a proper understanding of their research potential it is essential to visit particular archives and to consult the unpublished guides, lists and inventories which are likely to be available on the premises.

NON-GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES

Privately generated records cover an even greater range of subject areas and record types than do government archives; however, they are rarely subject to equivalent regulations or controls with regard to their preservation. It is difficult to make generalised statements about the various institutions or the kinds of records they hold, since there is no uniformity either in the purpose for which they were established or in the policies under which they operate.

Original records of considerable historical value can be found in apparently unlikely places, so the researcher looking for particular information may need to seek far and wide. In many instances historical records still remain in the possession of the organisation or company that generated them. In a few cases professional archivists have been employed to maintain and organise these records, as is the case with the BHP archives in Melbourne or the Westpac archives in Sydney. Most readily accessible private records are to be found in public institutions such as libraries, archives, galleries and museums which collect and preserve historical records for research and display purposes.

A number of universities, colleges and schools have established archives concerned with their own history. Wealthy private schools have usually been more interested and more able to afford an archives section than most public schools. Some colleges and universities have established archives that go beyond their own immediate institutional needs; some hold large collections relating to the educational, economic, cultural and political history of their state or region and a few collect on a national scale.

The recognition that surviving records of Australian industry from the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards were in grave danger of disappearance through neglect or company rationalisation led to the establishment of the Archives of Business and Labour at the Australian National University in 1956 and the University of Melbourne Archives in 1960. Both these institutions house important collections of business archives, ranging from the records of pastoral and mining companies to those of manufacturing and retail firms. They also hold the archives of trade unions and employer associations, and have each produced comprehensive guides to their holdings. In more recent years, they have been joined by the University of Wollongong Archives and an archive at James Cook University, Townsville, which have a more regional bias.

Scientific records, especially those containing original data, have suffered even greater neglect than business records. The Australian Academy of Science has in recent years supported moves to preserve the archives of science, including a University of Melbourne science archive project designed to locate and process collections for deposit in existing institutions. The academy holds records of scientists and scientific societies and notes acquisitions regularly in its journal, *Historical records of Australian science*, continuing the groundwork prepared by A. Mozley. The CSIRO has established its own archives to cater for its extensive holdings, and also takes in some private records of its staff. Records containing scientific data from as early as the 1860s were inherited by the commonwealth when it took over various functions, such as magnetic observatories.

University archives hold faculty records relating to scientific, medical and engineering disciplines, while some of the professional bodies, such as the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, have set up their own archives. Records of major scientific value are also to be found in the possession of museums, herbaria, botanic and zoological gardens and geological surveys.

There are so many separate religious organisations holding archives that a Church Archivists Society was formed in 1981 and has since produced a directory. Most religious archives consist

of records of the diocese, the parish, the society or the order; some are under the auspices of a church historical society which tries to bring together the archives of individual churches and religious groups. Their holdings are of significance not only for the history of the denominations, but also for the development of schools and hospitals in the region. Not all are accessible to the public, but their custodians seem prepared to help with information.

Of particular significance are the archives of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the Australian War Memorial and the National Film and Sound Archive, all of which are located in Canberra. These and similar institutions are surveyed in the above-mentioned *Our heritage*. The establishment of a specialised body such as the National Film and Sound Archive owes a lot to the fact that film and sound media are impermanent and require special storage and handling, as well as to the recognition that they should be preserved as irreplaceable historical records. Although a commonwealth institution, its collections are almost exclusively from private sources, since government-generated films and sound recordings are catered for by the appropriate government archives. Among these is the ABC archives, located in Sydney, which utilises storage facilities provided by Australian Archives in New South Wales.

Computer-generated records already form part of the archives of many organisations. They present problems because of their high rate of obsolescence in matters of format and of the technology required for their use.

Some of the most outstanding collections of Australiana, including original records, are to be found in libraries such as the Mitchell and Dixson libraries in Sydney, the National Library in Canberra, the La Trobe Library in Melbourne, the J.S. Batty Library in Perth and the John Oxley Memorial Library in Brisbane. The history of the establishment of special collections and manuscript libraries within the state library system can be found in Biskup and Goodman's *Australian libraries*. All of them aim to hold comprehensive collections of printed and original material relating to their respective states.

The course of Australian history has dictated a certain amount of overlap in the holdings of these major libraries—after all, Queensland and Victoria were part of New South Wales until the 1850s—and of rivalry in their collecting activities. The commonwealth outbid the Mitchell Library for the original manuscript of Captain Cook's journal in 1923, and there are sometimes genuinely competing claims for the papers of individuals whose careers have involved both state and federal positions. For these and other reasons papers relating to the life of particular individuals may be found in two or more institutions.

A number of public and municipal libraries have established special collections of original records, usually of particular relevance to the district. Notable among these is the Newcastle Region Public Library, which holds considerable business archives and local government records and has published inventories to them.

Each Australian state has a major historical society, with which numerous local history societies are affiliated. Their activities in the collecting field vary enormously, and their holdings range from extensive collections of material to a few prized local documents. There are also many specialist historical societies, covering fields such as military or maritime history, railways and aviation, many of which are actively engaged in collecting logbooks, diaries and other unique materials as well as published records. Each state boasts at least one genealogical society with a large and growing membership. These, like local historical societies, are likely to establish research collections, including microfilm copies of birth and shipping records, locally transcribed cemetery inscriptions and extensive indexes of names.

A *Guide to collections of manuscripts relating to Australia* has been published at irregular intervals by the National Library since 1965. It must be regarded as a starting point in any search for original source materials of a non-government nature, despite its considerable shortcomings. It lacks a subject index and, since it relies on entries contributed by the institutions which hold the collections, is neither consistent in its level of description nor comprehensive in its coverage.

Ironically, the researcher can probably locate records about Australia held abroad more easily than those held in Australian institutions, thanks to the Mander-Jones guide, which gives

extensive coverage of records relating to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region held in the British Isles, and to the continuing work of the Australian Joint Copying Project, which not only arranges for the microfilming of overseas records but also publishes handbooks describing the material in each series. The microfilm copies are deposited with special collection areas on state and national libraries. For further details on such guides see chapter 8.

Inventories and subject guides to special archival collections have generally been produced by organisations or groups who recognise that their need for historical records is severely hampered by a lack of knowledge concerning their whereabouts. The Department of Architecture at Adelaide University, for instance, has published *A manual of architectural history sources* in several volumes, containing useful information by state about government and private records, including maps, plans and pictorial material, as well as about the institutions which hold them. *Women in Australia*, which surveys published and unpublished records held in all major institutions, state by state, was compiled as an International Women's Year project.

Guides compiled for sectional interests are often of use to researchers in other fields, especially when more general guides are lacking, since they contain basic information about institutions and their services as well as comment on types of records held. Such subject guides are normally dealt with by state, because of the way that holdings of records are compiled. There are also general guides to sources by state or region, which contain references to archival records.

Very few institutions have published complete, or even select, guides to their holdings. Many of the finding aids are available only on the premises and consist of miscellaneous lists, inventories and indexes. The Mitchell Library has published a catalogue of manuscripts acquired up to the late 1960s. The Australian War Memorial, the Archives of Business and Labour (Australian National University) and the University of Melbourne Archives have published general guides to their collections. Some other institutions, such as the University of Tasmania, the Newcastle Region Public Library or the Riverina–Murray Institute of Higher Education in Wagga Wagga, have commenced publishing a series of finding aids. The National Library has published guides to some of its major collections, and the references to manuscript holdings also appear in C.A. Burmester's *Guide to the collections* which is discussed in detail in chapter 3. Others have contributed regular information about their accessions to another publication, such as a journal or annual report, or compiled guides to particular collections. Information about such piecemeal guides can be extracted from Alan Ives' bibliography up to about 1977, but neither his compilation nor the other guides mentioned here are being updated.

Institutions acquire private records, whether of individuals, corporate bodies or societies, by purchase, donation or bequest. When acquiring such material they are morally and legally bound to respect the wishes of the former owners or their heirs regarding conditions of access and copyright. The Copyright Act makes copyright of unpublished documents perpetual, makes no distinction between ordinary correspondence and works written for publication, and vests copyright in the author of the work or the writer of the letters. Institutions often attempt to acquire copyright along with the original documents themselves.

'Charging floor of BHP Newcastle open hearth shop, including works locomotive.' Unknown photographer, 1948.

BHP ARCHIVES, MELBOURNE

