

# *The management of archives*

*Judith Bright*



I would like to address two questions in this session: the first is “is the library of a theological institution an appropriate place for the storage, organisation and promotion of archive and manuscript collections?”

And secondly, “how might a collection of archives and manuscripts enhance and and enrich the printed and electronic resources of the library?”

Over the last few weeks there has been a fascinating discussion on the New Zealand Records Management listserv about librarians versus records managers and archivists. While records management is way at the other end of the library –archives-records management continuum, for a small institution there is a good deal of overlap, so I have been following the discussion. Very timely of them I thought, and almost put up a question myself about this paper and what ideas they had.

It all started when an organisation called Metrowater advertised for a qualified librarian ... to “develop a best practice records management” (extend that to mean archives). – and advertised it on the records listserv. What followed was a huge outrage by archivists and records managers that librarians should be seen as able to do that job. There were comments like

- Any records manager can do the library stuff. Heck, it’s all worked out for you
- Libraries and archives have separate objectives
- If you want to know about indexing and thesaurus construction, ask a librarian. On the other hand, if you want to plan and move a lot of documents around an organisation efficiently, ask a records person, librarians are much to impractical.

Then it got into librarian bashing comments (tongue in cheek type stuff of course), and then they got the message that there were some librarians who were members of that listserv.

Anyway, how does all this relate to the topic in hand, which is about manuscript and archival collections in a theological library. *Do* librarians and archivists have separate objectives? *Is* the above enough to put you off any thought of even venturing into the realm of non-published materials?

At the broadest level, I would see libraries and archives as having the same objectives: and that is to facilitate access to information. The management of that information in regard to printed versus mss materials are two very different beasts: many archivists would never see the two as ever coming together, but there are many organisations where this is just what happens. I would like to suggest several reasons why it may be appropriate for a theological library to venture into the realm of collecting **appropriate** archives and mss materials.

**The first is the best use of available resources.** - that is, Resources for the purchase of information source materials, and resources for the organisation and storage of the same. I am not sure of the position in Australia, but the majority of religious organisations in New Zealand have limited resources for the setting up of an archive repository or for the employment of staff trained and or experienced in the handling of any sort of information. While the setting up of a whole new archives might be an impossibility, the addition of a part time person, and the use of existing space

chives might be an impossibility, the addition of a part time person, and the use of existing space might well be possible. Archive collections are usually deposited or gifted without cost – not that that makes them cost free, as there is still the cost of organising them.

**This leads onto a second reason** for considering archival collections as a part of a theological library. That is, the availability of such records for research purposes. Archival records which can be a valuable addition to the research resources available to our students and researchers, are often difficult to access if they are held in an unorganised cupboard somewhere. But simply moving them to a library situation will not solve this one. There does need also to be a commitment to ensuring that someone with archival skills is available to at least guide the arrangement and organisation of any archival collections.

**The third reason is the enhancing of your library collection.** This could be particularly appropriate if your institution is a teaching one which is trying to upgrade the level of collection for teaching / accreditation purposes. Many of us have moved rapidly from the teaching of diplomas or undergraduate degrees to suddenly having to provide collections to support postgraduate research. While an archives or mss collection cannot in any way replace a good library, it can offer areas of research which are unique to your institution. You can then also concentrate on collecting the printed material which will support your archives collection.

Note that earlier I said **appropriate** archives. It would be very easy to collect anything that was offered to you, without regard for any sort of collection development plan. In the same way that a library printed collection is, or should be guided by the Library's Collection Development Policy, so should any collection of manuscript and archival material.

In a larger collecting institution, a wide variety of manuscript and archive collections may be collected, but a specialist library has no right to collect material which does not fit pre-defined criteria. If Joe Bloggs walks in off the street and offers you his grandmother's diaries, the Collection Development Policy will give you the guidelines to suggest a better place for them to go. If a parish offers you their papers, because you were helpful to them once, and you know that they actually belong in the Diocesan archive down the road, then that is where they should be directed.

The meaning and value of archives derive from the social and organisational context in which they were created and used, and from their links with other records. It can be said that used or interpreted out of context, their significance can be lost or compromised.

Archivists provide for the continuing useability of records, by managing them in ways which preserve their meaning and value as well as ensuring their long term physical survival. It therefore makes good sense for institutions such as ours to only consider collecting manuscripts and archives appropriate to the collection.

One such possibility is the archives of your own organisation. Are these being collected by another part of the organisation, or are they gathering dust in a basement or cupboard. If you do put forward a proposal to be the repository for these papers, what other obligations will you need to meet, and what advantages will there be to the library in doing so?

Sir Hilary Jenkinson, one of the significant names in archival theory identified what he called "the moral and physical defence of the archives" as being the archivist's primary duty. What he meant

was, that archives must be cared for in ways that safeguard their authenticity, and preserve their context and links to other records. This ensures their useability, and capacity to fulfil **administrative, legal and social roles**, as well as the ability of the repository to provide suitable long-term care and security for these records. In the case of an organisation's archives, is there a clear line drawn between their semi-current records and what is actually archives? If you take on the whole lot, you may find yourself acting as a records clerk.

**I want now to share with you a case study** of one institution that moved from being a printed materials collection only to a joint printed and manuscript/archive collection, and the reasons why that happened.

The Kinder Library at St John's and Trinity Colleges has book collections which started to be collected in the 1840's, but it was not until 1978 that a chance remark led to the establishment of the archive and manuscript collections as well. The initial impetus for the arrangement whereby the Kinder Library became the repository for the archives of the St John's College Trust Board, led to responsibility for the Anglican Church's national records – the records of the General Synod, Secretary, Archbishop, commissions, committees and boards.

The initial intention had been simply to ensure that this material did not get lost. The Trust Board had run out of storage space; the Church did not have a permanent home as the Archbishop was domiciled in whichever diocese he happened to be bishop of. Parts of collections had been deposited in a variety of places, and there was at that stage no way of knowing what records actually existed from the Church's 150-year-old history. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia had neither the funding nor the premises to set up their own archives

St John's College (and Trinity) were starting to have conversations with degree granting institutions, with thoughts of moving an LTh to a theology degree. One of the necessary resources for this to happen was an adequate library. The Kinder Library was known to be a good undergraduate library, but did not have strengths in many areas for post graduate research. There has been a good deal of emphasis on contextual theology in New Zealand – of the recognition of the place of theology out of the experience of the people, and so, gradually, the recognition of the value of the Library's archive and manuscript collections has been acknowledged.

The Library has emphasised the rich New Zealand Church resources we hold as a resource for post graduate study. The archives and manuscript collections now include those of the Anglican Church, early Methodist missions, the church in Melanesia and Polynesia, and a number of ecumenical ventures. This archival material gives us a conspectus level 5 collection in some very specific areas. Note that all those collecting areas relate to the Colleges' directions: St John's and Trinity have worked together in an ecumenical setting since 1972, hence the ecumenical body collections such as the Joint Commission on Church Union, and the Ecumenical Secretariat on Development. The records of Anglican Trusts Board in New Zealand are those which have funded the College, or assist in the funding of the Melanesian Church. There are strong historical precedents for holding their records for them. We have been officially designated the repository for the records of the Anglican Church in New Zealand. This does not include diocesan or parish records. The General Synod, which is the governing body for the Anglican Church contributes an annual sum for the "care and organisation of its records", and the majority of it goes towards the salary of an archivist. That person spends part of his week on those archives and the rest of the time on other things in the Kinder Library. The Church could not have afforded to set up a whole separate repository, and probably

Today there is a collection comprised of 150 record groups, many of which have been used by researchers. There are three current PhD students who are using the archives at the Kinder library as the primary research collections for their work. There are a number of others who would have had difficulty with their chosen Master's thesis topics if that resource had not been available to them.

There has been a certain challenge in managing the two collections side by side. The manuscript collections have given impetus to collecting all possible printed items to support the archives and manuscript materials – ie. both by and about the organisation, its aims and objectives. Church newspapers, all the little pamphlets, unpublished papers, audio and video items

Last year I presented a paper in a workshop at this conference about the way that we had utilised archival principles in the arrangement and storage of these printed collections. In summary, having to do an expansion of the LC classification for New Zealand Anglican and Methodist items (LC provides something like one number – shared with Australia -), we created a classification based on the provenance of the items rather than its subject content. This enabled the printed support material to be arranged by the organisation that had created it, and has been valuable to our researchers.

Access to the archive collection itself, one would have to acknowledge, has been influenced by its library environment, although we believe that we have not compromised any key archival principals. All groups of records are on an archives database (ARK). We have followed the directions of our National manuscript collecting library, the Alexander Turnbull Library, in enhancing the computer records with Library of Congress Subject headings, and AACR 2 style of personal names and corporate bodies. There is an AACR 2 style of publication called *Archives, personal papers and manuscripts* which is most helpful in this respect. The database has enabled us to create printed lists for researchers, as well as being able to search for specific items of information. It is our intention to have all these lists as part of our reference collection, making, we hope, the archives collection as accessible as the book and periodical collection.

Library collections and archive collections can sit side by side. The purists may not be altogether happy. But the advantages to both in a specialist area as I have outlined, outweigh the negatives. Librarians cannot presume to be archivists, just as archivists, despite the comments from the listserv, cannot presume to be librarians. There is room to work together, and use the skills from both professions to facilitate access to an enhanced collection in a specialised area.

*Judith Bright*  
*Librarian*  
*St John's College, Auckland*

At the ANZTLA conference, Newman College, 7 July 2000, the session entitled 'Archives management' was jointly presented by Judith Bright and Michael Piggott, whose paper follows.