

Denominational Collections: Trash or Treasure?

These papers were originally presented as part of a panel discussion between Robin Radford, Suzanne Ryan and David Hilliard on Church Archives at the 21st ANZTLA Conference held in Adelaide, 13-16 July 2006.

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Church Archives: an introduction

By way of introduction to the Archives presentation at the Adelaide Conference, Robyn Radford made the following remarks.

Facts

Let me start with some obvious facts. While there is some shared territory between librarians and archivists, between libraries and archives,

1. An archive is not a library, although sometimes the two functions live under the same roof;
2. An archivist is not a librarian, and vice versa, unless specifically trained; and
3. An archivist is not a records manager.

Therefore it is useful to understand each others' roles and responsibilities.

Church Records

In terms of religious archives, church records are defined very broadly to include both denominational and interdenominational records, records of relevance to church and religious life, activities, theology, philosophy, history,

and the legal and business obligations of church organizations. In other words, these cover the broad range of records for which we as church archivists have a responsibility.

Triggers

Why and when may librarians be challenged with the question 'Trash or Treasure'? I would identify this:

Before you throw anything out, remember the cliché, what is trash to one person may be treasure to another.

Some true situations:

1. Some thoughtful person brings in a box of books, journals, pamphlets, photos, sermons and other paraphernalia, which have had value for them, and they hope will also be treasure for 'the Church'.
2. The librarian of a Bible College is asked to advise on, and even manage, the College archives and records. In the case of a small denomination, it may even be the churches' records, registers, correspondence and financial and other business records.
3. There is a growing awareness of the need of the Theological

College for financial and academic accountability in the changing world of legal implications and accreditation procedures.

4. Storage pressures – something has to go to make way for the new.
5. Location move.
6. 21st birthday – time to look back, reflect and celebrate – but where are

the records? Who might have them?

Archivists are usually happy to investigate broken boxes of old things, check out cellars and attics, and even take possession of filing cabinets of papers. However, we don't, and can't accept and keep everything that comes our way.



Suzanne Ryan is the Adelaide Archdiocesan Archivist for the Catholic Archdiocese.

As a panel we discussed at length the need for both a succinct title for our session but also one that would allow us to address some of the many issues surrounding church records. While each of us will address a separate aspect of 'church/religious records' drawing on our own individual experience in using or managing church materials, we hope collectively that the session will provide you with an understanding of the historical relevance of the various classes of church records, and provide you with a clearer sense of the different roles of Archives and Libraries when dealing with those records.

My own talk will deal briefly with the following three issues:

- the different functions of Archives and Libraries
- the historical relevance of the various classes of church records
- the methods used to manage church records so as to preserve their historical significance and retain their archival value

First some definitions. What do mean by the terms archives and libraries? How are they each defined and what are their main purpose and/or respective mission statements?

The definitions that I've chosen to use are:

Archives

"Archives are documents made or received and accumulated by a person or organisation in the course of the conduct of affairs and preserved because of their continuing value." (*Keeping Archives* (2nd ed) / Judith Ellis: 1993, p.2)

Libraries

"In its traditional sense, a library is a collection of books and periodicals. It can refer to an individual's private collection, but more often, it is a large collection that is funded and maintained by a city or institution. This collection is often used by people who choose not to, or cannot afford to purchase an extensive collection themselves. ..." (<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)

Mission Statements

Archives

"Archivists ensure that records which have value as authentic evidence of administrative, corporate, cultural and intellectual activity are made, kept and used. The work of the archivist is vital for ensuring organisational efficiency and accountability, and for supporting

understandings of Australian life through the management and retention of its personal, corporate and social memory." (Australian Society of Archivists Inc: 2006)

Library

"The mission of St Mark's Library is to provide and manage information resources to support St. Mark's National Theological Centre in its work of theological education, professional ministry training, and public theological discourse. The Library is also a specialised resource of theological materials for the church and the nation." (St Mark's National Theological Centre Library. ACT)

What exactly is a Church Record?

Unfortunately it's not as easy to define just what is meant by the term 'church record'. Church records can and do exist in all kinds of formats; they are created by many types of church organisations and agencies and, depending on their source and the type of information contained within the record, there will often be constraints on both their use and accessibility.

As religious librarians you will often be faced with these types of issues and this will usually influence your decision on whether or not there is a benefit to your organisation in keeping them, i.e. are they trash or treasure?

Examples of the types of records that will be found in religious archives are:

1. Personal papers: e.g. Archbishops; Clergy; Lay People; Religious Orders
2. Parish records: Sacramental Registers; correspondence; minutes of parish committees; councils; financial & insurance records; property records (deed of title, etc)
3. Records of church organisations and/or agencies: e.g. CWL; YCW; St Vincent de Paul Society

4. Academic (colleges, schools): e.g. curriculum; minutes of various academic committees; staff and student records; academic publications (school annuals)
5. Publications; e.g. newspapers; parish histories; centenary celebrations
6. Religious texts: e.g. missals; prayer books; theological texts
7. Audiovisual: e.g. photographs; videos; audio-cassettes

Evidence and Memory

I'd now like to talk about the concepts of evidence and memory and in particular, the importance of evidence in verifying historical facts.

Evidence requires the preservation of memory to give legitimacy to historical research.

Church records form an essential part of the 'memory' of our society and are of vital importance. If we rely on our memories only, essential evidence will be lost.

The custodian of records has the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the 'evidence / memory' especially when you, as custodians, choose to keep records and integrate them into your library collection, either as a separate archives or in some other way. And an important issue in all this is that, unlike library materials, archives are concerned with the Provenance of the record.

Provenance is the agency, office or person of origin of a record; i.e. the entity that created, received or accumulated, and used the records in the conduct of business or personal life; i.e. it is found in the creator or source of the record.

As with our earlier look at some of the types of church records, the sources or creators (Provenance) come from both people and organisation:

- Deceased Estates (Clergy and Lay Persons)
- Religious Orders
- Religious / Pentecostal Groups
- Social Welfare groups
- Charitable Groups

Finding Aid

The following excerpt is from the *Finding Aid* for the Brisbane Anglican archives and illustrates the arrangement of the records according to their Provenance:

ALLORA-CLIFTON - SPRING CREEK ST MATTHEW'S CHURCH

Date Range: 1874 - 1969

A worship centre in the parish of Allora. [Series ALLOS004 - Parish records created by the provenance of Allora-Clifton]

ANFIN

Previously known as Diocesan Savings Scheme, Diocesan Development Fund and then Diocese of Brisbane Development Investment Fund and finally ADIF (Anglican Development Investment Fund).

Date Range: 2003 -

ANGLICAN BOARD OF MISSION - AUSTRALIA

This provenance is the Brisbane Diocesan branch of the National Mission Agency. The name of the Provenance was originally Australian Board of Missions. This was changed in 1996 to the Anglican Board of Mission - Australia. [Series ABMAS154 - Organizational records created by the Anglican Board of Mission and its subsidiaries]

ANGLICAN CARE OF THE AGED

[Series ACOAS225 - Records of the diocesan department responsible for care of aged persons]

ANGLICAN DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT FUND

Previously known as Diocesan Savings

Scheme, Diocesan Development Fund and then Diocese of Brisbane Development Investment Fund
Date Range: 1993 - 2002 [Series FINAS258 - Financial Services]

Original Order

It is also essential to keep all archival materials in their original order so as to ensure that any books, papers etc. retain their 'meaning' and relationship with other materials

Classifying items as is they were books in a library might help the librarian to retrieve items but it obscures their archival meaning and makes material much harder to use because of the simple fact that vital information on the context of the records and their relationships with each other would be lost.

To give two examples:

I recently received two large cartons of records that had been kept by a (now deceased) prominent lay person in the church who I'll call John X. The material included many letters from previous Archbishops and other important clergy, plus some correspondence concerning John's involvement with arranging an important church event. If these materials are separated and classified on the basis of their subject content (i.e. church event) and/or according to the author of the letters (Archbishop Y) then all evidence of John X's involvement with the event or relationship to the Archbishop will be destroyed.

Photograph collections provide another good example, particularly when they're from one person or family. Photographs are very often arranged in family hierarchy and this valuable information - which is often particularly valuable for later identification - is lost if they're sorted into subject such as: males; females; group photos etc)

Other Issues

Preservation

It's impossible to cover all the aspects involved in preservation of materials but some of the more important facts I'd like to stress are:

Storage: wherever possible acquire special archive-quality storage mediums;
Digitisation: investigate the possibility of digitisation (e.g. microfilming)

Second copy: make a second copy for users to access and store the original

Suppliers: the National Archives can supply a list of accredited Archives suppliers, which includes such well-known firms as Albox; Zetta Florence and Conservation Resources, to name but a few.

Local history societies are also good sources for information on local suppliers or contacts.

Ownership

Check that the donor of the materials has the authority to hand over the records and wherever possible have the donor sign a Deed of Gift or Donation Form.

Copyright

Does the donor own the copyright of the records and is he/she willing to transfer the ownership? If in doubt contact the Copyright Council

Privacy

Check whether the records contain information of a private or personal nature and whether public use of the material will infringe Privacy legislation.

Conclusion

Although archivists and librarians have much in common, particularly their roles as service providers and custodians of information, the guiding principles that inform their works are quite distinct. I hope my words have given some insight into the more important of these distinctions.



David Hilliard holds academic status as an associate professor in the department of History at Flinders University in Adelaide where he taught for many years. He has published widely on the history of Christian missions in the Pacific Islands and the religious and social history of Australia.

Introduction

To introduce myself, I am an historian of modern Christianity, mainly in the Pacific Islands and Australia. I first did research at a theological library in the early 1960s and since then have become familiar with a great many libraries and archives, in Australia, North America and Britain. And I am also a collector of religious pamphlets and obscure publications, ever since 1957 when as a teenager I bought a Catholic Truth Society pamphlet, for sixpence, from a church tract case in Auckland. That was the foundation of what is now quite a large

collection of pamphlets and local church histories and guides: some 40 pamphlet boxes and two cartons.

Almost nothing is trash

My fundamental point is this: trash is a loaded term. Almost everything can be treasure for someone at some time: if not at present then in the future. Like all other historical evidence, it all depends on what questions you are asking and what you are looking for. What is one person's trash might well turn out to be another's treasure-trove.

New approaches to religious history

The sources, printed and unpublished, that are most easily available to historians of religion are those that record the actions, policies and views of those who led religious institutions. Those who have held power and status are those who have left the most abundant records. And until recently almost all of these have been men. It is not hard to find something about prominent male clergy and church structures. It is much harder to find out about everyone and everything else: one has to search harder and make use of whatever scraps of evidence one can find. So, printed and archival sources that might easily be dismissed as of little importance might one day yield rich fruits for historians who are exploring the history of Christianity from below and therefore come to the material with new questions.

For the last forty years, historians of Christianity have sought to move beyond top-down models of church history and have been exploring new areas of the subject and new ways of approaching them. There is much interest these days in the diverse ways that religion is experienced and practised and transmitted, not only by church leaders and theologians but by the general population and by those who sit in the pews. In other words, the subject is being democratised and it is much more complex than ever before

I myself am a member of the UK-based Ecclesiastical History Society. Each year the incoming president of the Society selects the theme for his or her year in office (one that reflects the president's own interests), which becomes the subject of its summer and winter conferences. A quick survey of the Society's conference themes for the last decade (published as the annual *Studies in Church History*) will give you an idea of some of the new fields and subjects that are being mined by church historians and which demonstrate the enormous diversity of the field:

the church and childhood; gender and Christian religion; continuity and change in Christian worship; use and abuse of time; the church and the book; the church and Mary; retribution, repentance and reconciliation; signs, wonder and miracles; elite and popular religion; and revival and resurgence in Christian history.

Gaps in library holdings

On this occasion I should like to talk about the kinds of printed materials that I have found valuable in my own historical research and which are often missed by specialist libraries. Over the last few years I have done research on popular religion in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, debates among Anglicans over sexuality, conservative and traditionalist movements in Australian Christianity, and several aspects of the history of Roman Catholicism in Adelaide.

I am of course very aware that theological libraries operate on tight budgets and that their primary role is to provide resources for undergraduate students of theology. Nevertheless, from the experience of my own research, I should like to suggest some areas that might usefully be developed, or at least not ignored.

1. Pamphlets

This is an area of special interest to me, partly because of my own collection and also because of my work as a weekly volunteer at the Adelaide Theological Library in the Adelaide College of Divinity, where I have put several thousand pamphlets onto a simple data base that will be available for library users. Most of these pamphlets are from Roman Catholic sources; no other branch of the Christian Church in Australia has used pamphlets so extensively as a way of providing instruction and information in every area of church doctrine, morality and practice, for devotional purposes, and to convey papal teaching. They provide unrivalled

insights into the ways that Catholicism has been imparted and understood at the ground level. These are what ordinary Catholics used to read. During its lifetime, between 1904 and 1986, the Australian Catholic Truth Society published some 1800 pamphlets. The great majority will not be found in any library catalogue and, to my knowledge, the only near-complete sets (though not listed as individual items in the catalogue) are held by the library of the Catholic Institute of Sydney and the Joint Theological Library in Melbourne. We at the Adelaide Theological Library have about one third of them, mostly from the former St Francis Xavier Seminary. Our own pamphlet collection extends much further, with booklets and pamphlets on almost every subject (some thirty categories) from every branch of the Christian Church. Such collections are potentially of great value to future historians in many areas, especially in the areas of worship and prayer, on family life and the religious education of children, social questions, and on issues that have been a source of controversy among Christians.

2. Tapes and CDs

Pamphlets are much less significant than they were 40 years ago. They have been supplanted by audiotapes, videotapes, CDs and DVDs. I have used them rarely, but what are we doing to preserve them as sources for future historians?

3. Newsletters and periodicals of special interest groups and movements within major denominations

Indeed this can include any Christian organisation outside the mainstream. For example:

- publications of the various Roman Catholic traditionalist and conservative groups such as the Ecclesia Dei Society, Fidelity and AD 2000.

- Travelling EMU, the quarterly paper of Evangelical Members within the Uniting Church.
- The Briefing, the fortnightly paper published by Matthias Media in Sydney, which conveys the views of the radical wing of Sydney Anglicanism.
- Publications of the Anglican Catholic Church, which broke away from the Anglican Church of Australia in 1987 over the issue of the ordination of women. It is affiliated with an international network called the Traditional Anglican Communion. The newspaper of the TAC, The Messenger (relaunched in June 2006 as the Messenger Journal) is edited in Rockhampton and published in Adelaide. Until recently it was not held by any public or theological library in Australia. Two years ago I gave its address to a senior librarian at the National Library whom I met over tea at a history conference, and the paper is now held there. This situation arose because the editor of The Messenger knew nothing about legal deposit requirements and no theological library was interested in subscribing to a paper that was seen as coming from a small, schismatic and reactionary body.
- Publications of the Movement for the Ordination of Women and other Christian feminist groups and their various conservative opponents (in the Anglican Church) such as Forward in Faith and the Sydney-based organisation Equal but Different.

All of these journals and newsletters are valuable sources for historians. Sometimes they are obsessive and even vindictive, but they convey the strongly-held views of minorities and provide a useful corrective and counterbalance to official denominational publications. They convey news and views that church leaders and their media advisers would often prefer to keep hidden or unpublicised.

4. Interdenominational and non-denominational organisations.

Theological libraries usually hold runs of denominational journals and yearbooks. But who holds or subscribes to the publications of bodies that transcend denominational borders? For example, interdenominational evangelical missionary societies, second advent and millennial groups, Pentecostal organisations, the creation science movement, the Festival of Light, the Zadok Centre, Christian Endeavour, ultra-Protestant organisations. I am very aware of the great number of newsletters, pamphlets and periodicals that have emerged from the charismatic movement in the older denominations since the 1960s and from the various Pentecostal churches, most of which are hard to find in any major library. Dr Barry Chant, the pioneer historian of Australian Pentecostalism, has done us all a huge service by collecting a vast quantity of material, now housed in the library at Southern Cross College in Sydney.

5. Privately published biographies and local church histories.

One comes across many of these by chance – through word of mouth, a stray flier, a report or review in a church paper. Often, because the author knows nothing about legal deposit or modestly believes that the book is of no particular interest to anyone outside the congregation or the family, copies are not placed in a state library. And often because these works provide scanty publication details they are often very hard to track down.

What now?

- Legal deposit. The continuing failure of church-based bodies to send significant publications to state libraries is depressing. Do theological librarians have a role here, to ensure that congregations and church organisations are regularly reminded of legal deposit requirements?
- Specialisation. Clearly theological libraries neither can nor should set out to collect everything published by every religious organisation in Australia. On the other hand, if theological libraries do not subscribe to minor periodicals or receive them, who will? There is plenty of scope here for specialisation. A major theological library might well decide to collect everything published by or about its own denomination or by people connected with that denomination within the state, or even nationally. A small college library might restrict itself to areas that are of special relevance to itself and the theological tradition it represents. Alternatively, it may decide to cooperate with a larger library or a denominational archives or research centre that will. That may mean having agents who will watch out and bring in new material as they spot it.
- Transfer of material to other libraries or archives that are willing to hold it. If something is offered and you do not want it or cannot handle it, you might consider finding out whether another institution in your city (or even beyond) is willing to accept it. The key words here are exchange of information, cooperation and coordination.

