

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

The Year's Work in Archives, by Kathleen O. Britton, Irene J. Churchill, C. S. Drew, R. B. Pugh, and Hilary Jenkinson. Reprinted from *The Year's Work in Librarianship*, 1938. British Records Association, *Reprints*, No. 9. (London. 1939. Pp. 52)

Beginning with the year 1933 this annual review of archival activities compiled by Mr. Jenkinson and associates for the Library Association has been reissued by the British Records Association as Numbers 2, 3, 6, 7, and 9 of its *Reprints*. The successive issues present a fairly adequate account of the progress of archival work in Great Britain and Ireland, but the information concerning such activities in other parts of the world is distinctly haphazard in character. Fragmentary data for the United States were included in the issues for 1935, 1936, and 1937; but the present issue contains merely a mention of a circular published by the National Archives and a statement that "we have not received in time for publication any news from America." One wonders whether or not such news was requested and, if so, from whom, and why it was not supplied, also if copies of *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST* and the *Annual Report* of the archivist of the United States were not available to the compilers.

The introduction to the number for 1938 stresses the effects of "the succession of political crises" on the work of archivists, among them being the necessity of weighing "the comparative merits and possibilities of evacuation or defence," the "impetus given to microfilm photography," and the diversion of much voluntary effort from archival work "to the purposes of national defence." The section on the British Records Association notes that its membership has increased to over eight hundred, emphasizes the value of the *Bulletin* issued by its Technical Section, and states that the special archives course organized by the association in the summer school of the Library Association was "very successful from every point of view except that of numbers." The activities of the Council for the Preservation of Business Archives, including the registering of such materials, are briefly noted. The section on the Public Record Office states that much time and thought were "devoted to the problem of protecting the public records from air attack" and "to elaboration of the machinery of emergency packing," lists important accessions, and describes the rearrangement of the museum. The section devoted to the activities of "local authorities, libraries and private bodies" contains encouraging reports of the provision of new "Muniment Rooms" in county buildings and the appointment of county archivists and notes that the records of the Company of Vintners of London have been microcopied and the films "have been enclosed in a stout metal cash box and lodged in the strong-room of a country branch of the Company's Bank."

The reports of activities in other parts of the British Empire and in certain European countries contain numerous interesting bits of information: The archives department of Southern Rhodesia, which was established in 1935, is making progress in "the work of arranging the records . . . but it will be some years before it is complete and until that time the public will probably not be permitted to search." In Ceylon, a Sinhalese "trained at the Public Records Office in methods of repair . . . has started work." In Malta important government records have been "transferred to a newly formed Manuscript Department of the Royal Malta Library." "Every document in the Belgian State Repositories anterior in date to 1100" has been photographed and "copies of each photograph have been sent to every repository, and to the university libraries." In Denmark, the Rigsarkiv has been divided into "two departments—one dealing with records earlier in date than 1848, with the public search rooms, with the organization of exhibitions, and so on; the other with the custody of the more modern records, and their production when requisitioned by government departments." In Germany building operations continued in many repositories, "a general reorganization of the Austrian archives system" was projected, much indexing designed to facilitate genealogical research was in progress, and "the preservation of other than public records" was "a major preoccupation." Schedules "for the weeding of archives" have been prepared in the Netherlands. The Italian archives were about to undergo a reorganization. Polish archivists were making progress "in the reconstitution of *fonds* scattered during the last century." One wonders what has happened to archives and archivists in these countries since 1938.

Despite its incompleteness, this annual survey should be read regularly by American archivists as a means of broadening their perspectives. It can be obtained, together with other publications of the association and the *Bulletin* of its Technical Section, through membership in the association, which is available to individuals at an annual fee of five shillings. Applications for membership should be addressed to the honorary secretaries in care of the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, W. C. 1.

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The National Archives

The Care of County Muniments, by G. Herbert Fowler, C. B. E., Ph.D., F. R. Hist. S. (London: County Councils Association. 3d ed. 1939. Pp. xi, 88. 4/6s.)

In 1910, in the course of the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Public Records, the deputy keeper of the public records, Sir Henry Churchill Maxwell Lyte, was asked by one of the commissioners whether or not he thought that his subordinates could profit by visiting foreign archives after the first training received at the Public Record Office. To this Sir Henry answered: "I do not think so; they would be our own records he would have

to deal with. We do not encourage people to write treatises or essays on comparative systems of that sort; what we want them to do is to be able to make a clear list, and arrange documents scientifically, and to be able to make a good précis. I do not think a knowledge of foreign archives would be much help."

This policy of archival isolation was a thing of the past even in 1910. The famous manual of the Dutch archivists containing some undoubtedly general principles of archival administration had already been translated into three foreign languages. At about the same time when "treatises and essays on comparative systems of that sort" seemed to be futile to Sir Henry, the International Congress was discussing common problems of librarians and archivists in Brussels and, in this country, one of the pioneers of archival science stated that in spite of differences of administrative and record keeping systems in the various countries, there existed a similarity of needs and a common stock of experiences, which would make it worth while investigating and observing the archival developments abroad.

It is in this sense that Dr. Fowler's book deserves the attention of American archivists. It contains hardly anything that would be of direct avail to them, and it contains a good many things, the term "muniments" with its aroma of old English lavender to begin with, that seem wholly inapplicable to the American scene. Still, the book is undoubtedly of great importance and full of suggestions to those interested in the protection of local records in this country and it reflects the enormous progress realized in this respect in England during the last twenty-five years. Dr. Fowler began working with local records in 1913; the first edition of his book was published in 1923, and the fact that by 1939 a third edition had become necessary testifies to its usefulness as well as to the expansion of the system of local archives centers in England.

After advocating strongly the "concentration of all County Records (sic!) in the care of a single custodian" the author discusses the "General Principles" of archives administration in the first chapter. His definition of document, record, muniment, and archivist, and his sharp distinction between the record value, administrative value, and historical value of records would seem to belong to those parts of the book which are less palatable to archivists of other countries. Chapter II is concerned with the reception and classification of records. Contrary to Jenkinson's opinion, which is only theoretically emphasized, it is stated that the county archivist cannot shrink from the task of participating in the weeding of useless records and that "sooner or later" he will "be called upon to make the decision, to sift grain from husks as best he can, and to reduce his Correspondence Files to something like a fiftieth of their present bulk." It is rightly said, therefore, "he should have received a highly special training in his profession and be constantly in touch with the head of the issuing department." Classification in the sense in which it is treated by Dr. Fowler means little more than assigning letter symbols to the

fonds of the different county committees and to their customary series of agreements, correspondence, letter books, minutes, etc. The principle of *respect pour les fonds* is tacitly acknowledged. It indicates, however, a none too great familiarity with the continental theory if the author in describing a case file, Rex versus Inhabitants of Bedfordshire 1823, believes that it constitutes "what the French Archivists call a 'fonds d'archives'—a 'Record Unit' (for want of a better translation)."

Further chapters deal with the treatment, the storage, and the use of muniments. Of these it may suffice to note that they are chiefly based on the practices and experiences of the Public Record Office modified by and adapted to the needs of a county record office. They are well stored with practical experience and sound advice.

A number of appendices enhance the usefulness of Dr. Fowler's book. One of them gives a very valuable historical "sketch of County Institutions." Another appendix reflects some impressions gained by the author from a visit to Sweden and an acquaintance with the Swedish archival system. Dr. Fowler believes that the Swedes being "a systematic and logical folk," have succeeded in concentrating all sorts of local records. In this, however, he is mistaken. Except for archives of certain municipalities and of the parishes which in Sweden have charge of keeping the vital records, archives of the local self-government, the so-called community archives, are exempt from state supervision.

With regard to these archives a circular, "Counsel and Directions Concerning the Care of Community Archives," was issued by the Swedish Riksarkiv on June 14, 1933; it contains excellent suggestions as to how archives of small communities might be stored, arranged, and described. Mr. Birger Lindén, who apparently drafted the circular, has expanded its contents into a booklet entitled *Kommunala Arkiv och deras vård* (Community Archives and Their Care. Stockholm. 1934). As Swedish records are preponderantly arranged according to the series system and as only modern records are involved, a good many of Mr. Lindén's suggestions may be useful to custodians of local archives in this country, unless we, too, believe that "a knowledge of foreign archives" would not "be much help."

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