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BRITISH ARCHIVES AND THE WAR¹

I MAY perhaps be allowed to begin by saying how much I appreciate the compliment implied in the invitation kindly conveyed to me by Mr. Buck to take some part in an annual conference of American archivists, and how truly I wish it were possible for me to be present on that occasion. I shall venture to hope that pleasure may prove one day to have been merely postponed, and meanwhile send my most sincere wishes for a successful meeting. I have only to add to these preliminary remarks some apology for a contribution which will be found to be little more than a series of notes; and, what is worse, notes compiled from a personal angle. Archivists in this country—that is to say those few out of a small band whose activities have not been diverted by the needs of the time to other services—have been fully occupied up to now in efforts to preserve their charges from the immediate dangers which successively presented themselves; and if, in happier circumstances, we are now venturing occasionally to turn our minds towards the problems of post-war reconstruction the change of attitude (pleasant as it is) does not make us any less busy. In short it has not been possible as yet to bring together the materials for that comprehensive survey which my title might suggest and which I should have liked to offer.

The Classification of English Archives

In order to make these notes intelligible I must begin by reminding you very briefly, what English archives are. You will notice that I say English. That is not because English archivists are out of touch with their Scottish, Irish, and Welsh colleagues. On the contrary, the closest possible co-operation is maintained. On a small committee of the British Records Association, for example, which has been con-

¹ A paper read by Solon J. Buck, archivist of the United States, in the absence of the writer, at the dinner meeting of seventh annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Princeton, New Jersey, November 15, 1943.

sidering lately important plans for post-war development, three members represent the three sister countries. But in Scotland and Northern Ireland both public administration in general and archives administration in particular differ in important respects from those of England, and the same may be said, with some modifications, of Wales. It is our usual custom therefore, in studying any large question of archival economy, to examine it first as it bears upon, or is illustrated by, archives in England—which are of course larger than those of the other three countries—and then to inquire how far and with what reservations the conclusions reached apply to the remaining parts of the United Kingdom. A similar observation may be made in regard to the archives of the dominions and colonies, which should certainly be included when one speaks of British archives; though here the distinctions are, of course, more marked and the extent to which co-operation between archivists has been developed at present much less.²

English archives then, from which my illustrations will be chiefly drawn, fall, according to a classification now generally recognized,³ into five categories: public (central), public (local), semi-public, private, and ecclesiastical. The first comprehends the surviving archives of all those bodies which we now call public departments or ministries—divisions of the central government which have in the past administered, or do now administer, under King and Parliament, the affairs of the nation as a whole; from the Exchequer, Curia Regis, and Chancery of the twelfth century down to the Treasury, Supreme Court and Home Office, Foreign Office, etc., of the twentieth.

The second (public, local) includes the archives of all those bodies which carry on, and always have carried on, those parts of the country's business which can be decentralized because they affect districts rather than the nation. The machinery through which this is done has altered a good deal through the centuries, but the regional divisions have remained much the same—the counties, the great boroughs which maintain a jurisdiction independent of the counties, and below these a multitude of smaller administrative units. The machinery

² One of the works in progress which the war has stopped is the proposed second volume of the *Guide International des Archives*, which would have covered the archives of all British dominions and colonies, including Cyprus and Malta. Much of the necessary information has actually been collected and will, I fear, be obsolete if, or when, the project can be renewed.

³ It is that used in the *Guide* mentioned in the preceding note and adopted by the British Records Association in Number 1 of its *Reports from Committees*.

which concerns us here, because it is represented by existing archives, was from, roughly, the sixteenth century down to the end of the nineteenth in the counties that of the justices of the peace whose jurisdiction, in origin purely legal, gradually came to cover every department of public administration; in the smaller districts it was that of the parishes, to whose primarily ecclesiastical functions activities of a purely lay character were similarly added. Modern legislation, some fifty years ago, transferred most of these acquired administrative functions from the justices to county councils, from the ecclesiastical parishes to separate civil parishes or to rural and urban district councils. The ancient archives were left for the most part with their original compilers.

In my third division (semi-public) are included all those institutions and corporations so characteristic of this country which, though their original object was and remains private profit, advantage, or satisfaction, have come to discharge public functions—educational, charitable, or social—which are recognized and which give them a certain official status. City companies; universities, colleges, and schools; hospitals and charitable foundations of every kind; the great institutions which govern the legal, medical and other professions; public utility undertakings; commercial bodies such as the great banking and insurance corporations, from the Bank of England and Lloyds downwards—all these come under this heading. All, needless to say, are by their nature compilers of archives; many have been in existence for a very considerable time; and some are of great antiquity, dating back three, four, five centuries or even more, and preserving from those early times a substantial quantity of records.

On the field covered by my fourth category (private archives) I need not expatiate, but there are three points to be noted. First, that it includes of course the archives both of institutions and of individuals; second, that among these are to be found the great accumulations of family papers which sometimes—when members of the family have played an important part in public life—have an official character and may even approximate, as in the case of the Cecil family, the importance and character of state papers; and third, that from dates much earlier than the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when “family papers” begin, there have survived in these same accumulations very large masses of documents connected with the tenure of landed property and in particular the records of manorial

jurisdiction. Let us add for completeness that it includes also, of course, at the other end of the scale, most of the enormous and increasing mass of commercial and professional archives.

My fifth category (ecclesiastical) is really a series of categories. For the division of archives which result from the activities in matters spiritual of the provinces, dioceses, archdeaconries, parishes, and other divisions of the Church of England, and those of the unions, congregations, and so forth of other churches, are really parallel to the civil divisions—national, local, semi-public and private—which we have been distinguishing. In the case of the Church of England, too, the archives almost equal those of civil administration in antiquity, and a number of the others date back for two or three centuries.

The total quantity of archives surviving from all these activities may be gauged by the reflection that the English have always been a conservative, though not a careful, people in such matters, and have had very few revolutions. Actually there are well over ten thousand ancient parishes, practically all preserving at least some archives of a reasonable antiquity, and an even larger number of manors whose records have been listed up to date. The total of charitable foundations of some importance for our purpose must reach well into the thousands. Ancient boroughs number between three hundred and four hundred. But I must not delay you any longer with statistics and estimates of bulk; indeed I owe renewed apologies for the length of this exordium.

The Need for Co-ordination

The point to which I have been leading may now be briefly stated. England differs from all the other great archives-owning countries of Europe in that there is no central control of all this mass of archives. The public records, my first category, have indeed been for a century with only a very few special exceptions under the general superintendence of a single official, the Master of the Rolls, acting through the Public Record Office. But with, again, only a very few exceptions, neither the Master of the Rolls nor the Public Records Office has any authority over the remaining custodians of archives, individual or corporate, nor is there any other authority charged with the duty of supervising any section of them. The Archbishop of Canterbury for example, although naturally he might exert great influence in the matter if he saw fit, is not regarded as having directly

either duty or authority in the matter of the archives of the church as a whole. In fact, one may say that for practical purposes the thousands of archives-owning individuals or institutions, public and private, whom I have named or indicated are all autonomous in the matter of their archives. There is no one who can say to them "do this" or "do not do that." You may possibly find in this state of affairs interesting parallels to draw, or distinctions to note, when you compare it with that which is familiar to you in the case of federal, state, county, and other archives in the United States. In any case you cannot fail to realize how it must affect the thoughts and activities of anyone in England who takes the view that all the archives of the nation, without exception, are by their nature related parts of a single whole and that their treatment should be conditioned by that consideration; still more when it becomes his pre-occupation to devise means of protecting them not merely against the ordinary dangers which may arise from carelessness or neglect in peace-time but against the instant, abnormal, and unpredictable perils of war.

The Situation Up To Date

I must not give the impression that outside the public records no work upon archives has been attempted by the state in England. Apart from a large amount of publication of texts, the old Record Commission of 1800-1837, whose final result was the creation of the Public Record Office, paid some attention in its *Reports* to local as well as national records; and several committees and commissions since then have also issued valuable reports. The Historical Manuscripts Commission, appointed in 1870 and still operating, has not only published many volumes drawn from private archives but also paid some attention to a certain number of those of the ecclesiastical and local categories. A royal commission appointed in 1910 not merely reported upon the present state of local and ecclesiastical archives but made some sweeping recommendations, which have never been implemented, for intervention by the state in this field. Upon two recent occasions, 1924 and 1936, legislation dealing with larger questions has incidentally given the Master of the Rolls and the Public Record Office some connection with particular classes⁴ of records outside the national category, and the first of these had the valuable effect of causing the approval by the Master of the Rolls of

⁴ Manorial and tithe records.

a number of local repositories as suitable places for the deposit of manorial records which the act had placed under his superintendence—a great stimulation to local interest. Lastly a church measure⁵ of 1929 has given to bishops the power—though, alas, not the means—to create diocesan record offices for the reception of parish and other ecclesiastical archives which could not be properly cared for in their original places of custody.

In the period which followed the last war the result of all these pricks to public consciousness began at last to appear in some way other than the publication of texts. Of these there had always been, comparatively speaking, plenty: almost every county had a society devoted more or less to such work. But now there began to manifest itself, here and there and in varying ways, generally under the stimulus of some individual enthusiasm, an apprehension of the fact that conservation and arrangement of the vast masses of surviving documents, even the provision of mere storage facilities for them, might be problems more urgent than the publication of small selections. Public libraries began to make collections of manuscripts and following this to demand assistants specially trained for their custody; and the Library Association and the newly formed School of Librarianship in London made corresponding provision in their curriculum. One county council started an archives department, built a new repository, even added a repairing shop; others followed its example. Deans and chapters raised funds to put their records in order; one large diocese succeeded in implementing—and very successfully—the terms of the church measure I have mentioned. And an increasing stream of custodians—parish clergy, city companies, boroughs, even some of the smaller local authorities—sought from time to time the unofficial advice or help of the Public Record Office. Finally in 1932 the British Records Association, an entirely voluntary organization but having the Master of the Rolls for its president and with the support of influential bodies such as the County Councils Association, came into existence with the express object of co-ordinating all this scattered effort; of encouraging those custodians of archives, still comparatively few, who were interested in the technique of archives keeping; and of stimulating the remaining multitude to follow their example. In the following seven years it achieved a remarkable success—much greater than the handful of persons who

⁵ A church measure is the equivalent in ecclesiastical affairs of an act of Parliament.

started it had ventured to expect: increasing its membership four-fold; establishing contacts with the dominions, colonies, and with foreign countries; holding conferences and organizing exhibitions which aroused public interest considerably beyond the bounds of its own membership; initiating the *Year's Work* and other series of technical publications; and in short it came within sight of converting the idea of archives work as a science and a profession into a practical reality.

And at this point the war came.

The Effects of War

I hope I shall not be thought lacking in a sense of proportion if I say that in the midst of all the dire possibilities with which our minds were naturally obsessed in September, 1939, a few of us could not help thinking with a special pang of its probable effects upon a movement still so young and an organization so imperfect as that I have just sketched. Some of these effects could easily be foreseen, at least in outline, by anyone whose experience went back twenty years and who had a little imagination. In the first place, of course, there was the possibility, so much increased since 1918, of actual destruction of archives by enemy action. Secondly, there was the danger, in some ways more certain, of destruction by our friends; in others words the inevitable call for waste paper in huge quantities for the purposes of munitions, and the efforts of indiscriminating zeal to meet it. And, third, came the less defined but undoubted danger to archives, especially private, semi-public and small local ones, involved in the general re-organization of the community and particularly in the requisitioning of houses, office accommodations, and buildings of all kinds for special war activities.

Only less lamentable than actual destruction was the apprehended discontinuance, if only from motives of economy in labor, of separate archives departments in centers of local government and other places where they had been set up, and the still more certain halt in the process of converting more of such bodies to an active policy in regard to their archives. A corollary to these considerations was of course an end, for an unpredictable period, to our hopes for the development of archival science and the building up in England of a recognized class and profession of archivists. Finally, the British Records Association itself seemed likely to be threatened with temporary eclipse if not with extinction as a result of the call upon all avail-

able energies, money and time to meet the more pressing needs of the nation.

Enemy Action

As you will have gathered from the long and generous review of our *Year's Work in Archives* which appeared in THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST in January, 1943, events have agreeably falsified expectations in some respects. Although there have been many and melancholy losses—one was mentioned in your review and even from our present imperfect knowledge I could cite others not less grievous in every category of archives—there have also been a number of happy and surprising survivals, to mention only three places: in Bristol, in Coventry, and at the Guildhall and other important points in London. Indeed in the case of more than one city company the saving of the muniments has been almost the only consoling feature in the tale of destruction of beautiful and historical things. This applies to at least three of the great companies which in recent years have played host to the British Records Association's annual conference or in other ways assisted its work. In one of these cases, you may have heard the tale already, but it is worth re-telling, the brick-built strong-room was almost all that remained. It was so hot that leather, inside an iron safe within the room itself, was found burned to a cinder—so hot that when, after some days, the company's staff felt obliged to open the door the inrush of fresh air set the contents ablaze. Yet almost all the muniments in that strong room were rescued and almost all are today practically unharmed, although streams of boiling water were added to the last stage of their trials. The documents of another company come to the Record Office from the ruins of a building whose destruction we ourselves had witnessed—it was not two hundred yards away from us—after a long period of immersion in water followed by active fermentation. Our repairing department will not readily forget the long lines of sheets tenderly separated and hung out to dry, nor the smell which accompanied first-aid operations. Yet they also are today hardly any the worse, at least to casual inspection. From the same source a quantity of modern lawyer's papers came to us, more than a year afterwards and still wet; but even these were not, as it proved, irretrievably ruined.

But I must not allow myself to be lured into tales of rescue work or convey the impression that the experience gained in regard to papers drowned or charred—for we have experimented also with that most

delicate problem—has not been paid for at a very dear rate, as indeed have a number of other conclusions which may now be added to the stock of archivists' lore. One of these is a most emphatic confirmation of the view that water, not fire, is the great enemy of the archivist. This does not mean that any measure of protection against fire can be diminished. Although the archivist who has protested in times of peace his fear of the danger from a casual spark may perhaps recall in future, with reminiscent amusement, times when he and his repository have stood for an hour or two under a thick shower of sparks, I do not think he will want to relax precautions. On the contrary, the dictum that stacked archives are extremely difficult things for conflagration to destroy, though demonstrably true, rests on two provisos: first, that the materials surrounding them are non-inflammable (it is the wooden uprights of the shelving or the wooden supports of the roof which have done the damage in so many cases), and second, that sufficient staff is present to deal with the fire in its earliest stages.⁶ Conviction of the necessity for plentiful fire-watchers is perhaps the knowledge for which London and other cities have paid most dearly. For the archivist fire-guards must always have a special function—that of preventing the necessity for floods of water. Not all the drowned documents have been so fortunate as those I have mentioned above. One of the things we have learned is the incredible speed with which mildew and fermentation may work in favorable circumstances afterwards.

Precautions

That last remark may lead to a few words about precaution in general. Naturally precautionary measures had been under discussion officially for some time before the war, although extra-officially it was more difficult to raise such questions. But after 1938, when there were still many who could not believe, until it occurred, that even Germans would go to the length of absolutely indiscriminate air-bombardment, preparation was a practical matter. At the Record Office, and I dare say elsewhere, structural alterations including such matters as facilities for access to all parts of the roof, above and below, and the installation of necessary equipment proved a surprisingly large task; but the possibilities of actually bomb-proof

⁶ At the Public Record Office we have throughout maintained night and day shifts, although the elaborately organized band with which we started has of course been much depleted since.

cover narrowed themselves upon investigation to the use of mines or tunnels. Since the quantity of such places was limited, and the installation necessary to make them suitable for manuscripts elaborate and costly, the archivist, hampered by the bulk of his charges, was at a disadvantage, especially in competition with the more obvious and spectacular value of the contents of museums and galleries. Comparatively few accumulations of archives have in fact found such protection, although there are notable exceptions.

On the other hand the policy of removal from built-up areas and distribution of risk by the use of more than one temporary repository and by the separation of classes which to some extent duplicated each other has been practiced on a large scale by the Public Record Office and preached by the British Records Association. The association has also been able to help in arranging the offer of hospitality by repositories in comparatively safe areas to those less fortunately placed from the point of view either of bombardment or of possible invasion. It is probable however that many custodians have taken this kind of precaution by means of a variety of *ad hoc* arrangements which their special circumstances made possible. If there were a proposal after the war to put a plaque on every country house that has acted as temporary repository for some quantity, large or small, of archives, public or private, I fancy that a large number of plaques would be needed.

At the Public Record Office evacuation had to be preceded by the very difficult business of selection. Ultimately a series of categories was prepared of classes to be successively removed if conditions allowed. The basis of choice was that a class (*a*) had not been printed and (*b*) was intrinsically, *i.e.*, in relation to the whole group of records of which it formed a part, of primary importance. Some concession was made also to the predilections of historians and other students, and to popular or spectacular values. In the end it was unexpectedly found possible, although the process took the best part of three years, to remove the whole of these categories and an extra one, consisting of specimens from classes not evacuated, in about ninety thousand carefully numbered and indexed packages—a weight of about two thousand tons. The buildings in which they have been bestowed include a castle, private mansions, a prison, and a casual ward. I need not tell an audience of archivists what it has meant to carry out these moves and to find manning for the temporary repositories from a small staff already much depleted and charged in addition with the task of defending the London office.

We entertain no illusions as to the future course and potentialities of enemy action. It is possible for instance that another high explosive bomb—you have heard of the first from the press so there is no harm in mentioning it—may do more than demonstrate an unsuspected usefulness in the Gothic towers of the Record Office. Even as I write the enemy is talking much of new terrors in store. We merely record thankfulness mixed with our grief for past losses, and hope for the future. It is the motto of the Cockney in 1940: "Go to bed hopeful and wake up thankful."

Microphotography

A precaution which I have not mentioned but which has been freely used is that of microphotography. Many large business houses had recourse to it in the period immediately preceding the war in order to safeguard their current papers; a service was arranged for solicitors by the Law Society, and so forth. But in addition there have been a number of schemes covering older archives, sometimes on a small, sometimes on a larger scale. I shall only mention three of the latter. The first is that initiated in the United States by which machines installed at the Public Record Office and certain other important centers are making films of great series of documents for deposit in the Library of Congress—a scheme equally beneficial to American students, who can use the films, and to English archivists, who see large classes of their documents given something approaching a double chance of survival. The second is an arrangement by which, at the Public Record Office the same machine is operated by the staff on duty by night, when raids permit, for the filming of early registers of probate from all courts from the fourteenth to the sixteenth or seventeenth century—a series or rather a quantity of series of records of extreme value which were not included in the American program. The third is a scheme for the filming at various centers of all parish registers. In one large diocese (Lincoln) this has actually been completed along with other work, and the diocesan custodian responsible reports a very great incidental gain in knowledge of the state of parish records in her district. A good deal has also been done in other dioceses.

In this big development in the use of microphotography by archivists we have a positive gain from the war: not only by the making of the films—which, to tell the truth, I think may prove to be of varying value—but by exploration of the limitations as well as the

possibilities of the process when applied to archives.⁷ In view of the great part which it is, I believe, destined to play in the development of archival work in the future this constitutes a real advance.

Paper Salvage

From precautions against our enemies it is an easy transition to precautions against our friends; the danger in both cases being that of indiscriminate destruction. The word salvage, by the way, has in current usage the initial disadvantage of two exactly opposite meanings: that of "salving" for the national need papers of all sorts, from omnibus tickets (literally) to records, which are presumed to be valueless; and that of saving papers which are not valueless from "salvage." In this instance the course of the war, which has increased the shortage of pulp in unexpected ways, has made the event worse than our anticipations. The necessary campaign for collection of waste has been comprehensively planned, tremendously publicized and carried out as it well could be by a multitude of enthusiasts who in many cases were not very knowledgeable. The result has been to present the British Records Association, which has shouldered the main responsibility for defense, with ever-fresh problems as fresh classes of local, private, and ecclesiastical records presented themselves in the light of new sources of supply to the imagination of the enthusiasts. Some of the attempts to parry these successive attacks are reflected in the series of *B.R.A. Memoranda*, a set of which, with some miscellanea, is annexed to this paper.⁸ Apart from publications, broadcasts by the Master of the Rolls, appeals made through local libraries, letters to the newspapers and so forth, the association has worked through an organization of some hundreds of voluntary "referees" all over the country who are prepared to advise salvage officers and proposing contributors to the salvage "drives." You have

⁷ Some notes on this subject appear in the current issue (No. 17) of the *Bulletin* of the Technical Section of the British Records Association.

⁸ The annexes, all issued by the British Records Association, are entitled:

1. *Obsolete Poor Law Records. Brief Hints on Review and Selection for Salvage.* N.d., 1 p.
2. *The Safeguarding of Parish Records, a Memorandum.* April, 1942. 2 pp.
3. *Records. What Should We Try to Save?* Memo. No. 3. May, 1942, repr. Aug., 1942. 2 pp.
4. *Salvage from Solicitors' Offices.* Memo. No. 4. Aug., 1942. 1 p.
5. *Old Parchments.* Memo. No. 5. Oct., 1942. 1 p.
6. *First Aid for Damaged Manuscripts.* Memo. No. 6. Dec., 1942. 2 pp.
7. *Modern Records. What May We Destroy?* Memo. No. 7. March, 1943, reissued April, 1943, new eds. May and June, 1943, reissued July, 1943. 5 pp.

heard, I think, of this in the review already cited, but I may perhaps record here that the organization is itself a monument of what may be done by mere devotion. It has been carried on, with all the vast correspondence involved, almost entirely by a single person.

What measure of success has been achieved by these various means will probably never be fully known. Even the larger losses will transpire only very slowly, as students here and there find lamentable gaps, after the war. I will not harrow your feelings with relation of the tales—some, I fear, true—which have reached us from time to time, of old established commercial houses which emptied their muniment rooms by the simple process of emptying them, or incumbents who placed the church chest at the disposal of the paper merchant. But that we have prevented quite a considerable amount of destruction is, I think, certain. I will instance only one local authority which was not only dissuaded from a scheme already approved for destroying the whole of the county's old poor law records but converted to the view that it was good policy to preserve a really representative accumulation of every class of them.

The association's method has been throughout to obtain the concurrence of the salvage authorities in its propaganda, to emphasize the relatively small amount which it was desired to preserve, to rely as much as possible on personal contacts, and to offer its aid not merely in saving but in destroying.⁹ There is in fact much work for the archivist to do in the way of encouraging intelligent elimination, as well as preservation. The demand for our latest *Memorandum*, which deals with legitimate destruction in accumulations of modern documents, although it has never been used as a circular it has six editions or issues in as many months, shows the value of this line of approach. The salvage campaign has at this point provided and unexpected but welcome opportunity for the association to spread knowledge and incidentally to improve its own position with the general public.

The British Records Association

From the preceding sentence and other indications in these notes you will have gathered that the association has found plenty of special tasks during this War. It has succeeded also, in spite of all preoccupa-

⁹ The Public Record Office, which by statute controls to a very considerable extent the elimination of papers by public departments, has also been very active during the war in hastening and encouraging the destruction of those papers which are not destined for permanent preservation.

tions, in finding people to do them. I may now add that its general work, though naturally much restricted, has not lapsed at any point. Committee work and printing have not ceased—indeed, as you will have gathered, they have found new channels. The annual conference, much shorn, has taken place in London each year—in 1940, to the accompaniment of an air raid, and should be held in 1943 at very much the same time at which these notes will be presented in America. All being well, members will meet in the hall—one of the few which survives uninjured—of a great city company. Propaganda for the maintenance and increase of membership, in peace-time a most important activity because membership means public interest, must obviously cease during war. But membership, although it has decreased,¹⁰ has not done so to anything like the extent anticipated and on the other hand there has been a small but steady flow of new members, which gives me the opportunity to record with gratitude the accession, in a dark hour, of a little band of new members from America—a very heartening gesture. We are also in hopes that the numerous contacts made in connection with the salvage campaign, especially with private and semi-public owners of modern commercial and professional archives, may be turned to account later.

The last remark may introduce the mention of one more point at which our work has drawn unexpected profit from the war. When, to meet the dangers of air bombardment and possible invasion, the whole country was divided into regions under commissioners for civil defence, the association endeavored to get in touch with these new authorities in view of possible eventualities of all kinds. One result of this was the circulation of a pamphlet of instructions for first aid to damaged manuscripts, since reissued through several channels. An even more important outcome was the preparation, for the information of commissioners and their staff, of the *Regional List* of addresses at which there were or should be accumulations of archives. It was not complete, for it excluded deliberately two of the largest classes—manorial and parish archives—and practically excluded certain others, and in many respects it was very definitely an improvisation. But it was the first attempt ever made at a national register of archives of all categories and as such had an importance which may well go far beyond the immediate occasion which produced it. It may

¹⁰ Before the war institutional members numbered about three hundred and individual six hundred.

form the basis for more elaborate, perhaps even for official, action in the future.

The Archivist in England: Future Developments

What form will this future action take? The archivist's profession has inevitably been for the last four years in a state of almost suspended development. Not entirely so: There is, for instance, at least one county authority which has actually started a new archives department during the war; and there are signs of stirring in other places. But development of the profession means two things, the provision of new posts and the availability of young people to take them; and both of these have practically ceased for obvious reasons. The School of Librarianship, which provided training, has closed down; and talk of a possible special diploma is in abeyance.

On the other hand we have now advanced so far in optimism as to be thinking of reconstruction and of the unique opportunity it will offer for new developments. This, in our case, could mean, if it occurred at all, only one thing: an increase in public recognition of the value of archives and, by implication, an increase in the amount of work to be done and in the number of people called upon to do it. In other words it would mean the final emergence of that profession, that organized science of archives, which at present, outside the Public Record Office, has so tenuous an existence in England. We are at the moment discussing this possibility and the best way of converting it into a reality. Let me conclude by telling you the lines on which, it seems to me, development might proceed.

They can be summed up in one word, co-operation—co-operation between the state and the local, ecclesiastical, semi-public, and private custodian or owner; co-operation between custodians in small groups formed upon regional¹¹ or other considerations; co-operation in the planning of work, in the pooling of knowledge, in the actual housing, sometimes, of the archives and making them accessible to students, in the provision of technical facilities, notably for repair work, even in the sharing of the services of ambulatory archivists. I do not think we shall arrive easily at any great measure of centralization. I even

¹¹ A singularly encouraging and promising plan is actually under discussion at present by which three county councils, the diocese covering their district and the corresponding chapter, and all the independent boroughs in the same area (with, probably, a large number of smaller units attached) would organize a single record office for their joint needs. Could similar arrangements, *mutatis mutandis*, be produced elsewhere a long step would have been taken towards the solution of a national problem.

hope we shall not, for the idea of unimpaired custody as an ingredient of primary importance in the evidential value of archives is clearly best served by leaving them as far as possible in the hands of their natural custodians. On the other hand it is very obvious that the dangers of neglect, destruction, or dispersal will not be smaller, and there is ground for fearing that they may be very much greater, in the midst of all the changes and chances which the near future may bring, than they have been in the past. Many of those thousands of custodians, unless they receive both guidance and help, will fail in their duty through ignorance, carelessness, or sheer lack of means. It is no use to expect the smaller local or ecclesiastical authorities—how much less the ordinary private owners—to install a complete archives establishment, but they may be brought to desire and enabled to secure their share in the benefits of a common organization.

How far in the turmoil of post-war adjustments, of competing claims on public attention and of demands for public economy, it will be possible to realize such hopes as I have indicated, time alone will show. But the fact that they exist and are even being voiced, after four such years as these have been for us, is something for which we may be thankful.

Conclusion

And the importance of all this? The justification of so much planning and thought in time of war?

I am not to attempt here an exposition of the value of archives, but if I were asked to define the creed of the archivist in four words I should say "the sanctity of evidence." It is not, primarily at any rate, his business to use or interpret his charges; he need not be interested in their contents—indeed it is in some ways an advantage if he is not, for that detachment preserves him from the temptation to *ex parte* procedure. His training, methods, and rules of conduct are in fact, or should be, such that he can at a pinch make shift to perform his functions faithfully without even understanding the meaning of the documents entrusted to him. His part is simply to conserve intact every scrap of evidence which not only the contents of the documents but their form, makeup, provenance, and position in relation to other documents have to offer. His aim is to provide, without prejudice or after-thought, for all who honestly wish to know, the means of knowledge. Viewed in these aspects the good archivist is the most selfless devotee of truth the modern world produces.

In an age in which untruthfulness is not only increasingly condoned but in certain quarters and by certain powers elevated to the status of a science and prescribed as a rule in the conduct of affairs—in such an age our profession may, I venture to submit, have a part to play the importance of which it would be difficult to exaggerate.

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