

Michael COOK*

* Dr. Michael Cook
Honorary Senior Fellow, Centre for Archive
Studies
University of Liverpool, UK
mgc00k@aol.com

A 20th Century Phenomenon: the Appearance and Development of Local Archives Services: a Case Study from the United Kingdom

COOK, Michael, A 20th Century Phenomenon: the Appearance and Development of Local Archives Services: a Case Study from the United Kingdom. *Atlanti*, Vol. 19, Trieste 2009, pp. 183-192.

Original in English, abstract in English, Italian and Slovenian, summary in English

This paper will examine a phenomenon of archives development in the 20th century, the appearance, spread and standards of non-government and non-official archives services. These services appeared and were elaborated in many countries, and arose in diverse contexts. The subject will be approached by examining the case of the United Kingdom, but with a view to furthering further research internationally. The approach is based on the idea that the physical characteristics of the archival materials initially determined the character of the services that developed on them, but that once in existence, local and unofficial archives services developed standards of their own. At the start of the 20th century, many nations had well-established national archives services, but there was a growing consciousness that large accumulations of archival material existed elsewhere, especially in the custody of local and provincial administra-

I am grateful for the opportunity to make this presentation. I believe it forms part of a current development in the world of archives, a development which is being celebrated in many countries, and internationally under the aegis of the International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA)¹. The central elements of the genre are (a) a further development of the disciplines of diplomatics (founded by Dom Mabillon in 17th century Paris) and administrative history, and (b) a deeper appreciation of the broad historical and philosophical movements under the heading of scientific history, intellectual and cultural movements, the origins of national identity, and a more complex understanding of the nature of historical truth (post-modernism). This paper takes a brief look at one aspect of these large areas of interest, focused on what happened in my country (the United Kingdom) but in the consciousness that similar developments occurred elsewhere, especially in Europe.

The 20th century is of course a very significant period in the development of archives services. At the national level there is a broad understanding of what happened. The foundation of the *Archives Nationales* in Paris in 1790 was a clear starting point. During the century the foundation of new universities and the generally increased awareness of national identity led to the rapid and widespread development of national archives services and the legislation that underpinned them. Despite (or perhaps even because of) the devastation caused by wars these developments were spread and deepened. The invention of the computer and the networks based on them, and the appearance of digital archives were the dominant themes of the latter end of the century. The education of archivists became more professional. By the year 2000 all archivists, whatever their workplace, were conscious of the new era and the enhanced role they would have to play in the future.

Outside the national archives, however, there were comparable developments arising from the same underlying forces. Outside central government, it was recognised that there were three major types of archive accumulations and that these demanded attention and resources. In the UK these were specified at the beginning of the century as

- The archives of local government, subdivided as
 - Judicial records (local and delegated courts)

1. The 5th I-CHORA conference will be held in London 1-3 July 2010: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ichora5/ (accessed June 2009).

- Rural provinces (counties)
- Cities and towns (historically self-governing)
- Parishes (local communities with some legal status)
- Para-statal organisations (statutory bodies for specific purposes)
- The archives of the Church, and its various branches
- The archives of individuals and families (at this period, principally noble houses)
- The archives of commercial enterprises.

[Note that the archives of unofficial, submerged or minority communities, which are a growing concern in the early 21st century, were certainly not included in this list.]

The analysis that produced this list was carried out in the UK by a formally established official central government enquiry, the Royal Commission on Public Records, 1910. The commissioners were persons eminent in public life (professors, teachers, lawyers, librarians) and the secretary, Hubert Hall, was one of the staff of the London Public Record Office (PRO). The commission's third report, published in 1919, was concerned with local archives².

At this date there was something of a general feeling that the British had fallen behind European standards.

“If [plans for local archives] were carried out, we in England might hope eventually to reach the standard for Local Archives which all Western Europe excepting Great Britain has long since attained”,

declared Herbert Fowler in 1923³. But after the second world war,

“as the English archive system nears completion ... [despite] multiplicity and the eccentric character [of much of it, there is] ... greater average density than in any other country in the world except Belgium and Switzerland a rich crop of archive repositories, actively flowering in a formerly semi-deserted garden of vegetating manuscripts”⁴

One may doubt the exact truth of either of these statements, but they reflect a widely held view that by about 1965 the British had made up for their previous backwardness. This decade marked what might be called the golden years for local archives. The future was to hold much expansion and change, but the singular enthusiasms of that period would be lost. I believe therefore that we can look at the history of local archives in three stages:

- 1898-1923: gathering information and setting the scene;
- 1923-1972: building the structure of a local archive service, using public opinion and self-help;
- 1972-2000: professionalising and spreading the service without central government direction or funding, but with the coming of a mass user public.

tions, the church, and in the homes of notable families (the archives of industries and businesses should form a distinct study, and were later to develop). Academic interest was quite strong, and efforts to exploit these materials concentrated at first on publication as a means of access, and on the development of specialist skills of interpretation. The main technical difficulties were the language (mainly Latin), the diplomatic of the earlier originals, and the palaeographical skills required to read them. There was generally less emphasis on technical conservation, and on management. However as the century progressed interests in these problems grew. In the 1920s the first practical manuals began to appear, as a result of successful pioneering projects in the establishment and running of local archives services. The process was both disrupted and stimulated by the Second World War, at the end of which a practically satisfactory model for a local archives service was in existence and was being copied in many different regions. This model contained a set of standards (not recognised as such) for the classification of the archives of local administrations and of the church; an agreed syllabus for teaching the technical skills required; a primitive standard for physical conservation of the objects; and above all a general recognition that the first work facing a local archivist was the recovery of archival materials held in private hands. These traditions, codified to a large extent by the 1960s, effectively determined the future of non-government archives services until the end of the century. The analysis of this development proceeds from an examination of the technical and physical problems posed by the nature of the archival materials that formed the basis of its work, and underlines the fundamental nature of these problems for the modern world and for other countries

COOK, Michael, Un fenomeno del XX secolo: l'apparizione e lo sviluppo di servizi archivistici non governativi e non ufficiali. Atlanti, Vol. 19, Trieste 2009, pp. 183-192.

2. Royal Commission on Public Records, Third Report ... on the state of the Public Records and Local Records of a public nature of England and Wales, London, HMSO (Cmd 367), 1919.

3. G. H. Fowler, *The care of county muniments*, County Councils Association, 1923, p. 2.

4. G R C Davis, *The University of Nottingham Department of Manuscripts, Archives*, 5(1961-2), pp. 145-50.

Questo articolo esamina un fenomeno relativo allo sviluppo degli archivi nel XX secolo: l'apparizione, la diffusione e la qualità dei servizi archivistici non governativi e non ufficiali. Questi servizi hanno iniziato ad apparire e sono stati elaborati in diversi paesi, e si sono sviluppati in contesti diversi. L'argomento verrà trattato iniziando con il caso del Regno Unito, ma nell'ottica di promuovere ulteriori ricerche a livello internazionale. L'approccio si basa sul concetto che le caratteristiche fisiche del materiale archivistico determinano all'inizio il carattere dei servizi che vi si sviluppano attorno, ma che una volta in essere i servizi archivistici a livello locale e non ufficiale sviluppano poi standard propri. All'inizio del XX secolo molti paesi avevano servizi archivistici nazionali ben strutturati, ma intervenne una sempre crescente consapevolezza del fatto che dovunque esistevano vaste accumulazioni di materiale archivistico, specialmente presso le amministrazioni locali e provinciali, le chiese, le famiglie notabili (gli archivi di industrie ed imprese necessiterebbero di uno studio a parte, essendo di sviluppo posteriore). L'interesse accademico era piuttosto forte, e gli sforzi di sfruttare questi materiali si concentrò all'inizio su pubblicazioni concepite come mezzi di accesso, e sullo sviluppo di talenti specialistici nell'interpretazione. Le principali difficoltà tecniche erano costituite dalla lingua (soprattutto il latino), la diplomatica dei documenti più antichi, e le competenze paleografiche necessarie alla loro lettura. In generale c'era minor enfasi riguardo l'aspetto della conservazione e della gestione. Tuttavia, con il progredire del secolo crebbe l'interesse per queste problematiche. Negli anni venti iniziarono ad apparire i primi manuali pratici, come risultato di progetti pionieristici di successo nel campo della costituzione e gestione di servizi archivistici locali. Il processo venne al tempo stesso brutalmente interrotto e stimolato dalla Seconda guerra mondiale, alla fine della quale era in essere un modello pratico soddisfacente per servizi archivistici locali che venne copiato da svariate regioni. Questo modello conteneva un set di standard (anche se non riconosciuto come

Setting the scene, 1898-1923

The Royal Commission's investigation was a remarkable start to a century of development. The commissioners personally toured the country and inspected the systems in use for record keeping in every principal town. They were received with some ceremony by local officials, and their published report gave details of what they found in every place. Some of their experiences were quite exciting; in small towns it was sometimes impossible to find suitable accommodation for them. However, the salient impression one gets from reading the reports of their proceedings was that actually the main records were reasonably well kept. Storage conditions were generally poor or inappropriate, but there were few cases that were really impossible, and in most places some work was in progress towards listing and organising the materials, usually because of the presence of enthusiastic amateurs.

“Although the Commissioners had evidence in several cases of a considerable expenditure having been made upon these local records, this seems to have taken the form of ambitious and expensive publications, such as texts or calendars, instead of summary lists which might have been prepared and printed at a comparatively slight expense. In few cases ... have proper steps been taken to ensure the cleansing, flattening or repair of the records or their protection from dust or vermin.”⁵

The first suggestion that there should be a network of local archives services was actually made in 1898, but led to no action⁶. But at the time of this Royal Commission, there was also already in existence the basis of a national network of finding aids, in the form of another Royal Commission, on Historical Manuscripts, founded in 1869⁷. It was this latter body that gave attention to the non-public records, particularly those of noble families and the families of former statesmen. We can therefore find here the elements of the formula that was to lead to rapid development and success: amateur expertise and enthusiasm; limited government initiative and investigation; and an embryonic network system.

There had always been individuals, usually from the upper classes, who had taken an interest in the archives to be found in the localities. Generally, their work was directed towards the publication of texts, rather than towards the setting up of management systems. A witness in 1836 had declared that “their efforts were likely to result in the substitution of an unfathomable sea of print for the unfathomable sea of manuscript”⁸. The idea of sustained management had not yet emerged.

Creating the structure of a local archive service, 1923-72

Local archival development in the UK in the first period showed that initiatives and support by the public is an essential fea-

5. *Ibid.*, appendix III, Reports of inspections made by the Commission (1914-1916), p. 104.

6. F. Yorke Powell, Preface to C. Seignobos and C. Langlois, *Introduction to the study of history*, trans. G. G. Berry, London, 1898.

7. R. H. Ellis, *The Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1869-1969*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3(1969), pp. 441ff.

8. Peter Walne, *The Record Commissions, 1800-37*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 2(1960), p. 15.

ture. There were two aspects to this: local and national.

Local public opinion, and work by local activists can be seen throughout the period. The principal pioneer, Herbert Fowler, began his work in Bedfordshire in 1913 by securing in his own home town, the appointment of a county records committee with formal status. Similar developments occurred in other areas. These committees were official, and so composed of elected councillors, who, at that date were mainly members of the educated middle class, many with experience as officers in the first world war. In addition, most counties had voluntary associations concerned with surveying archive holdings and publishing texts (in some cases also collecting materials)⁹. Surprisingly large numbers of people were interested in this work: a local committee in the 1940s might be attended by as many as 600 people¹⁰.

By 1933, when the first guide to historical societies was published, there were over 300 local societies¹¹. Many people, therefore, were involved, certainly enough to create a climate of opinion. But who were these people? This is hard to establish, but in this paper I am making a presumption that (a) they were an educated elite, accustomed to participating in public affairs, and allied with at least some of those elected to public office in local authorities; and (b) they were not the same people who began flooding into local archival reading rooms after 1980, a large proportion of whom were mainly interested in their own family history.

The need was to transform this large pool of public interest into a movement to create institutions, and to change the emphasis from publication to management. In 1922 appeared the two books that set out the requirements of a managed archive service outside central government. One was the well-known manual of Sir Hilary Jenkinson (which was based on his work at the Public Record Office but was intended to be read outside that specialised clientele); the other was a simple procedural manual by a local amateur archivist, Herbert Fowler¹². This latter gave an outline of what archives were to be found in the localities, how to treat them, and how to set up an archives service. It included a plan for such a service; both books advocated official institutions working with professional staff, although at that time there were no professionals available for the work.

At the level of national action, those interested in local archives banded together in 1932 by forming the British Records Association (BRA). This voluntary organisation grew rapidly: the following year it had a membership of 85 institutions and 170 individuals¹³. It continued to grow until some time in the 1970s, by which time it had been upstaged by the Society of Archivists (SoA), a more strictly professional body. However, the BRA, which has a professional subgroup and an influential journal (*Archives*), continues to exist, and will probably become part of a unified National Council on Archives in the 2010s.

It is hard to overvalue the work of the BRA in the middle of the century. During the war it published a series of *Memoranda* giving advice and direction on various aspects of archival work, including the rescue of archival material from wartime salvage drives. In

tale) per la classificazione degli archivi della amministrazioni locali ed ecclesiastici, un programma condiviso per l'insegnamento delle richieste competenze tecniche, uno standard primitivo per la conservazione degli oggetti, e soprattutto il riconoscimento generale del fatto che il primo lavoro da affrontare per un archivistica locale era recupero dei materiali archivistici detenuti da privati. Queste tradizioni, largamente codificate negli anni sessanta, determinarono di fatto il futuro dei servizi archivistici non governativi fino alla fine del secolo. L'analisi di questo sviluppo procede dall'esame delle problematiche tecniche e fisiche poste dalla natura del materiale archivistico che formava le basi del suo lavoro, e sottolinea la fondamentale natura di questi problemi per il mondo moderno e gli altri paesi.

COOK, Michael, Pojav nastanka in razvoja nevladnih in služb izven arhivov kot pojav 20. stoletja. Atlanti, Zv. 19, Trst 2009, str. 183-192.

V prispevku razpravljam o pojavu, razširitvi in standardih v razvoju arhivov v 20. stoletju, ko se pojavijo nevladni in neuradni arhivi. Ti arhivi so se pojavili in pričeli z delovanjem v več deželah in se pojavijo v različnih zvezah. Tu prikazujem analizo nekaterih primerov v Britaniji in poleg tega še v drugih državah. Moj predlog je zasnovan na ideji, da so fizikalne karakteristike arhivskih materialov prvotno zasnovane na dejavnosti arhivskih

9. For example, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Yorkshire: Archives, 4(1931), p. 287.

10. R. Ellis, *Archives*, in «The year's work in librarianship», Library Association, Vol. 14(1951; covers 1947), p. 274.

11. H. Jenkinson and I. Churchill, *Archives*, in «The year's work in librarianship», Library Association vol.6(1933), p. 215.

12. H. Jenkinson, *A manual of archive administration*, London 1922, reissued 1937 and 1965. G. H. Fowler, *The care of county muniments*, County Councils Association, London, 1923.

13. Maurice F. Bond, *The British Records Association and the modern archive movement*, in A. E. J. Hollaender, *Essays in memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, London: Society of Archivists, 1962, pp. 71-90.

služb in se ob njih razvijejo, toda ko nastanejo nove, pa neuradne arhivske službe razvijejo svoje lastne standarde. V začetku 20. stoletja so mnogi narodi dobro razvili in razširili arhivske službe, toda pri tem je nastalo vedenje in spoznanje, da nastaja veliko dokumentarnega in arhivskega gradiva pri številnih ustvarjalcih. To gradivo je nastajalo pri lokalnih ustanovah in skupnostih, v cerkvah, v znanih in uveljavljenih družinah (o gradivu v podjetjih bi bilo potrebno uokviriti posebno študijo kdaj pozneje). Zavedati se moramo, da je bil akademski interes za proučevanje in uporabo tega gradiva zelo velik. Pri vsem tem pa so pri uporabnikih nastale tehnične težave zaradi jezika (latinščine), diplomatskega jezika v prvih originalnih zapisih in tudi zaradi pomanjkljivega znanja paleografije, čeprav so znanja o teh dejavnostih rasla. Leta 1920 se je pojavil prvi priručnik kot posledica pionirskih projektov v izgradnji in uporabi gradiva v lokalnih arhivskih službah. Ta proces je bil med drugo svetovno vojno prekinjen, ostali so le nadomestni modeli za lokalne arhivske službe, ki so ga potem kopirali v več regijah. Ta model je vseboval klasifikacijske standarde, ki se sicer niso tako imenovali, z njimi pa je bilo možno izobraževati tehnični del arhivskih vprašanj. To je bil enostaven standard za fizično hrambo dokumentacije, predvsem pa se je dalo z njim priti do evidentiranja arhivalij, ki so jih imeli privatniki. Tako nam analiziranje razvoja omogoča pot raziskovanja tehničnih

1937 it established the principle of the sanctity of the fonds in local archive usage. Next year it set out a classification scheme for local archives¹⁴. From 1933 it reported on the development of local archives services in yearly contributions to the *Year's work in librarianship*, a regular survey that included notes on work in countries all over the world¹⁵. In its journal the BRA published descriptions of the origin, development and work of a large number of local archives services¹⁶. However, an influential observer noticed in 1945 (at the end of the BRA's great period of initiatives) "... the comparative failure of the BRA to enlist the co-operation of academic historians on a large scale..."¹⁷. These historians had indeed taken an interest in the movement too, but by way of the University of London's Institute of Historical Research. The influence of this Institute was also powerful, for example in its management of the large project (still not complete) entitled *the Victoria History of the Counties of England*¹⁸. Despite this, the failure to associate historians and archivists closely (except in a few individual cases) was to be a significant feature in later development, especially when professional training came to be considered.

The BRA's pioneering period was perhaps fitly drawn to a close when in 1951 it published 'The ideal layout of a local record repository'¹⁹. By this time it had come to be recognised that a local archives service would need a structured staff: the suggestion was that each should have 4 professionals, 4 trainees, 1 lecturer, 2 conservators, 4 typists and clerks. It was this process of professionalization that finally pushed the BRA into the background.

Expansion of local archives services proceeded with increasing rapidity. This expansion was slowed by the Second World War, but accelerated immediately after that. In 1945 the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts took two initiatives. It set up a National Register of Archives (NRA), and actively encouraged the formation of local committees to liaise with it. Over the next decade these committees existed in most parts of the country, and met frequently with enthusiasm. Their members were drawn from the general public, with a preponderance of minor nobility and members of the professional classes. The main work undertaken by them was a nation-wide survey of surviving historical archives.

To co-ordinate this survey the NRA attempted to systematise it. They designed and disseminated three pro-formas, labelled First, Second and Third reports. The idea was that there would be progressively more detail in each report. These forms, when filled in, were to be returned to the NRA, which would then become the hub of a national network. Although the use of the forms was fairly quickly dropped, the project overall was brilliantly successful. The NRA bought mass copying and printing equipment (at this period no cheap photocopiers were yet available) and would copy and distribute any lists sent in to them. The body of reports and descriptions of local archive accumulations rapidly became a major resource. The HMC's reference room, just off Chancery Lane in London (quite near to the Public Record Office) became the core of a highly professionalised service: it followed the model of a local record office (provincial archives) but without itself holding any archive material. From this base, starting in the last two decades of the 20th century, the NRA began to develop specialised tools (indexing systems, descriptive standards, management standards) that would inform the fully

14. H. Jenkinson, *General report of a committee on the classification of English authorities*, BRA Reports from committees No. 1(1936), in R. H. Ellis and P. Walne (eds), *Selected writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, Society of Archivists 1980, reprinted 2003, pp. 122-146.

15. Begun in 1929, published by the Library Association, London, annually until 1954. Subsequently a new series, *Five years' work in librarianship*, continued to contain reports on archives until 1988.

16. *Archives*, passim, starting with No 1(1949) on Bedfordshire.

17. M. F. Bond, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

18. Commenced 1899: www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk, (accessed June 2009).

19. I. P. Collis, *Archives* 6(1951), pp. 31-35; continued in 7(1952), pp. 52-59. This reported on a survey that included the archives services of ten local authorities.

networked system that we have at the start of the 21st century. The presence of this embryonic hub, we can now see, was essential to the further development of local services.

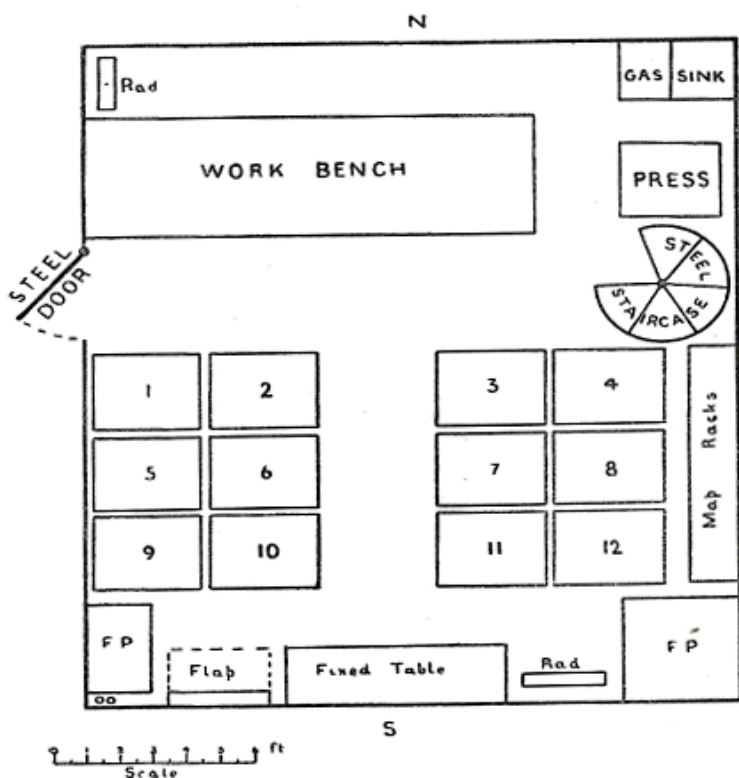
One of the most important achievements of the mid-century was what became the basis for a standard local authority archives service (County Record Office). Fowler, in 1923, set up a plan for the physical arrangements of such a place. He assumed then that all the functions of an archives service could be contained in a single room, or at least in a single building. The Fowler plan, later elaborated, encouraged archivists (amateur and professional) to design their own premises and equipment. Since until the 1960s there were very few trained archivists, the result was a tradition of self-help and reluctance to follow the example of others. There was no conscious acceptance of any standard until late in the 20th century.

in fizikalnih vprašanj, ki jih postavljajo arhivski dokumenti, kakršni so v svoji osnovi in poudčuje osnovno značilnost in bistvo arhivskih vprašanj v sodobnem svetu, pa naj gre za Britanijo ali pa za katerokoli drugo državo.

SUMMARY

This paper contributes to the history of archives, supported by both IAS and the International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA). The 20th century was the period in which national archives services developed strongly; the parallel development of non-national archives is examined here, in the light of the experience of the UK. Local and non-national archives were defined as those of local government (judicial, cities and provinces, parishes, the church, individuals and families, and business). In 1900 the UK was seen as having fallen below European standards. The analysis assumes that there were three stages of development: setting the scene, 1898-1923; creating the structure of a local archive service, 1923-72; and professionalising the service and the formation of networks, 1972-2000. The first two of these stages are looked at in some detail. The general finding is that the process required three contributory factors: some interest by central government; a great deal of activity by interested amateurs, and the growth of this interest into national collaboration and networking. The activity of central government, though a necessary factor, was piecemeal and without compulsion or funding. Two Royal Commissions provided investigation and some central reference service, which developed into the National Register of Archives in 1947. Local amateurs began persuading local government agencies to establish archive services as early as 1913. In 1922-3 two basic publications (including one by the well-known Sir Hilary Jenkinson) provided a basic pattern for professionalising the work. Amateur interest became national by the foundation of the British Records Association in 1932. Gradual extensions of the law assisted networking and the growth

SUGGESTIONS FOR A MUNIMENT ROOM 51



One of the reasons for these characteristics – eccentricity and self-reliance – was the lack of organised training schools. Herbert Fowler, the true first pioneer of local archives, had been a scientist. His close association with Hilary Jenkinson at the Public Record

of standards. The operation was backed by the start of archival training courses at the Universities of Liverpool and London in 1947. By 1970 an almost complete coverage of the country had been achieved, although it operated mainly in the rural provinces (cities being served by libraries). Interestingly, both world wars of the 20th century seem to have stimulated these developments, and ex-officers provided many of the active amateur workers. In 1972 the reform of local government was radical: provinces with a history of more than 1000 years were abolished in a series of rationalisations. The central archives, the Public Record Office, began to supervise; local archivists, faced with modern problems and the advent of computing, began to adopt common standards; and (largely by voluntary action) local archivists began to put together the electronic networks in operation today.

Office meant that he absorbed the basic principles of archives administration from the beginning of his work at Bedford in 1913. The next generation of county archivists came from his tutelage. One of them, Frederick Emmison, began his career as a clerk serving under Fowler. He became county archivist of Essex, and built up there an establishment which at that time was unheard of in the whole country. Its principal features were its outreach, and its organised and professionally supported educational work in and for schools.

Thus we may see that the formation of professionally organised local archives services in local government was principally the result of the action of interested individuals and voluntary associations. Their work came to its highest point in about 1960, at which time 42 out of 60 county authorities had established archives services; there were over 140 such services in the country as a whole²⁰.

Over the same period, action by central government was not absent, but was indecisive and partial. The Royal Commission of 1910 (reporting on local archives in 1919) was thorough in its investigations, but led to no reforms. There were further initiatives as the century proceeded. In 1924 new legislation placed the control of the archives of manors (local authorities set up in the middle ages as part of the feudal system; many still remained in existence) under the superintendence of the Master of the Rolls (a senior judge, also responsible for the Public Record Office). In 1936 the archives of tithes (taxes levied on farm produce, based on laws inherited from the middle ages) were included in this category. These interventions, probably not consciously intended, were

“startling innovations ... [which] implied official liaison (not otherwise provided) between the Public Record Office and Local Authorities but also asserted in effect the propriety of state intervention”²¹.

This propriety was formally recognised when in 1963 the PRO appointed a ‘travelling officer’ to visit and inspect local archives services that held these and other local public records²². Although this led ultimately both to formal recognition of local repositories and to the establishment of a detailed standard for them, it has to be noted that the PRO had no powers of coercion, and no budget to spread the financial burden of these services.

What the emerging body of professionals did with their new structures of local archives services after the second world war is very curious. Instead of managing the archives of their own employing authorities (most of which were ancient in origin), they looked around the territory of their county, and continued the surveys initiated by the earlier Royal Commission and by the NRA local committees. In other words, they behaved like the amateurs who had preceded them. This was

“the heroic period when priceless family archives were located and revealed, and of the means diplomatic and piratical by which owners were induced to deposit ...”²³.

Another feature of the local archives services of the mid-century was that their work generally extended over rural areas, and left

20. Derek Charman, *On the need for a new local archives service for England*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3(1965-9), pp. 341-347.

21. H. Jenkinson, *Archive developments in England, 1925-50*, in *Miscellanea archivistica Angelo Mercati*, 1952, p. 276.

22. J. H. Collingridge, *Liaison between local Record Offices and the Public Record Office in the light of the Public Records Act 1958*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 2(1963), pp. 451-457.

23. R. Ellis, *Archives in «Five years' work in librarianship»*, *Library Association*, 1958 (covering 1951-5) p. 343.

the urban centres without similar services. The cities and towns of the kingdom generally possessed libraries, the legacy of the 19th century enlightenment. Many of these libraries took an interest in collecting archives as well as other manuscript materials. In 1931 an observer noted that public libraries

“have lately extended their activities to manuscripts, with the result that the staffs have to possess a certain knowledge of archival technique”²⁴.

The lack of close connection between library-based urban services and specialist archives services in the countryside was one of the factors militating against the development of interest in the archives of industry and business. The Business Archives Council was established in 1934, but a great many of the business archives that have survived have done so because they were collected by the relevant territorial archives²⁵. There remains a strong division between (a) archives services that collect external materials, and those that devote themselves entirely to the management of their employers' archives; and (b) specialist and library-based archives work. Another similar division exists between both of these types of service and the (increasingly widespread) archives work done by the universities, some of which dates from this period in the mid-century.

A professionally run local archives service demands that there should be appropriate training facilities. As we have noted, the earliest county archives offices trained their staff by apprenticeship. How did the practitioners who trained these apprentices learn their own trade? At the beginning of the century, Sir Hilary Jenkinson was the most prominent figure among a group of archivists working in the PRO. Their influence was sufficient to ensure that trainees were well informed about basic archival practices such as the principle of provenance. The publications of the BRA in the 1930s and 1940s spread the knowledge of these principles. In 1947 two university courses (London and Liverpool) started to produce what we might term ‘qualified’ archivists in small numbers, and during the next two decades these courses were joined by similar ones in Wales and Oxford. At University College London, 78 students did the training in archivology over the period 1948-60, but, it was noted, “very few applicants ... have ever been inside any repository, whether central or local”, before they started²⁶. Another commentator noticed that students on these courses were oriented towards academic research, and were “failed historians”. He provided a table showing that he had been able to count a total of 290 staff in 35 repositories, 43% of whom were qualified²⁷. A more seriously planned survey in 1971 (the first of a regular series since then) found that “professional staff approximates to half the total staff”²⁸. (This is the system into which I myself was introduced in 1958). The atmosphere in most local archives, where nearly all of the routine and clerical work, and the supervision of readers, was done by professional staff was one that tended to perpetuate the practices initially developed by the amateur pioneers.

24. H. Wood, *Archives in «Five years' work in librarianship»*, Library Association, 1931, p. 287.

25. www.businessarchivescouncil.org.uk (accessed June 2009).

26. Raymond Irwin, *The education of an archivist*, in A. E. J. Hollaender, *Essays in memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, Society of Archivists, 1962, p. 184.

27. Derek Charman, *On the need for a new local archives service for England*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3(1966), pp. 341-347.

28. W. R. Serjeant, *The survey of local archives services, 1968*, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 4(1971), pp. 300-326.

Professionalising the service and the creation of networks, 1972-2000.

1972 marks the start of the modern archives world in the UK. This was the year in which central government began to break down the traditional structures of local government, and to devise new geographical divisions and new allocations of duties and powers. The English counties, first established under the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the centuries before 1000 CE, had remained self-consciously autonomous entities: it was in this context that they became aware, during the first half of the 20th century, of the rich inheritance of archives that they held. After 1972 all this changed, and the emphasis thereafter was on management systems, the establishment of standards and targets, the elaboration of networks, and the professionalising of training courses: the modern world.

Private and public initiatives came together in a rather unstructured way at the end of the century. A National Council on Archives (NCA) (“with powers to make regulations ... affecting archives”) had been proposed in 1943, as part of the discussions that led to the formation of the NRA²⁹. This failed, but when finally the NCA came into being in 1988 it was as the joint action of several voluntary societies (both for users and for practitioners) with interests in archives. This remained the situation until 2000. Sporadic government action continued: the Local Government Act 1972, breaking the tradition represented by the ancient counties and boroughs of the country, and by centuries of conservative practice, “created for the first time a unified and rational system of local record repositories”³⁰, but provided no powers of coercion, nor sources of funding. After 1997 central government for the first time set up a ministry with responsibility for local archives, and a structure for coordinating them: the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. This provided a milieu in which strategic planning became a requirement; but as before, the essential elements of funding and powers of coercion were lacking. The old British way of fumbling along with no radical reform continues.

But it is to be noted that in the second half of the century the main initiative came to and has remained with the professional groups.

The creation of national networks covering all varieties of non-central government archives services was by the voluntary work of professionals. From 1964 to 1999, the Historical Manuscripts Commission (parent body of the NRA) issued a regular series of a hard copy publication, entitled *Record Repositories in Great Britain*. In 1995 the contact details of repositories were made available online. This was known as Archives Online, which has since been abbreviated to the ARCHON Directory. Networking the finding aids of the actual holdings of archives offices, now under the generic title of *Access to Archives* (A2A) began at the end of the century by voluntary activity³¹. Other networks began in the same way: for example, university archives set up their network Archives Hub, which also led the way in establishing technical formats for the inclusion of data³².

In the 1980s, there appeared a popular interest in family and

29. R. Ellis, *Archives*, in «The year's work in librarianship», 14(1951, but covering 1947), p. 261.

30. M. Reed, *Archives*, in «British librarianship and information work 1976-80», Library Association, 1982, pp. 248-58.

31. Managed by the National Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk (accessed June 2009).

32. www.archiveshub.ac.uk/ (accessed June 2009).

social history. This is now an important factor, perhaps the most important in all, in furthering modern development in archives work. These are not the same people as were those whose amateur work was so important in earlier developments, but the need to provide a service for them has altered the staffing structures and dominated the aims and outcomes of the service.

It was not until after 1970 that records management began to make a slow appearance among the local archives community. The Records Management Society of Great Britain was set up by voluntary action in 1983, and has since become the focus of a growing discipline, with its own training resources³³. This discipline gained ground slowly, and the coming of the digital age has found that many local archives are still not prepared to adopt its responsibilities. A survey of archival activities outside central government in the 20th century would not include significant developments in the management of digital archives³⁴.

Conclusion

This paper has been an exercise in archival history which has been particularly interesting to me, since it covers, in its main part, the period of my own professional involvement. Perhaps I may be forgiven for betraying some degree of nostalgia for the period in which developments were mainly in the hands of working professionals, without stimulus or assistance from central government, but with recognition and support from an informed public. Overall, it is public support that has shown itself to be the decisive influence.

I hope that this study will encourage the work of colleagues in areas of the world where there has been less readiness for the development of archive services, since it shows that these services will emerge when the right conditions appear. I therefore dedicate it especially to colleagues I had the privilege of working among, in East and West Africa.

33. www.rms-gb.org.uk (accessed June 2009).

34. The National Digital Archive of Datasets (NDAD) contains material from 1963 but was not itself associated with the National Archives in the 20th century: www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk (accessed June 2009).