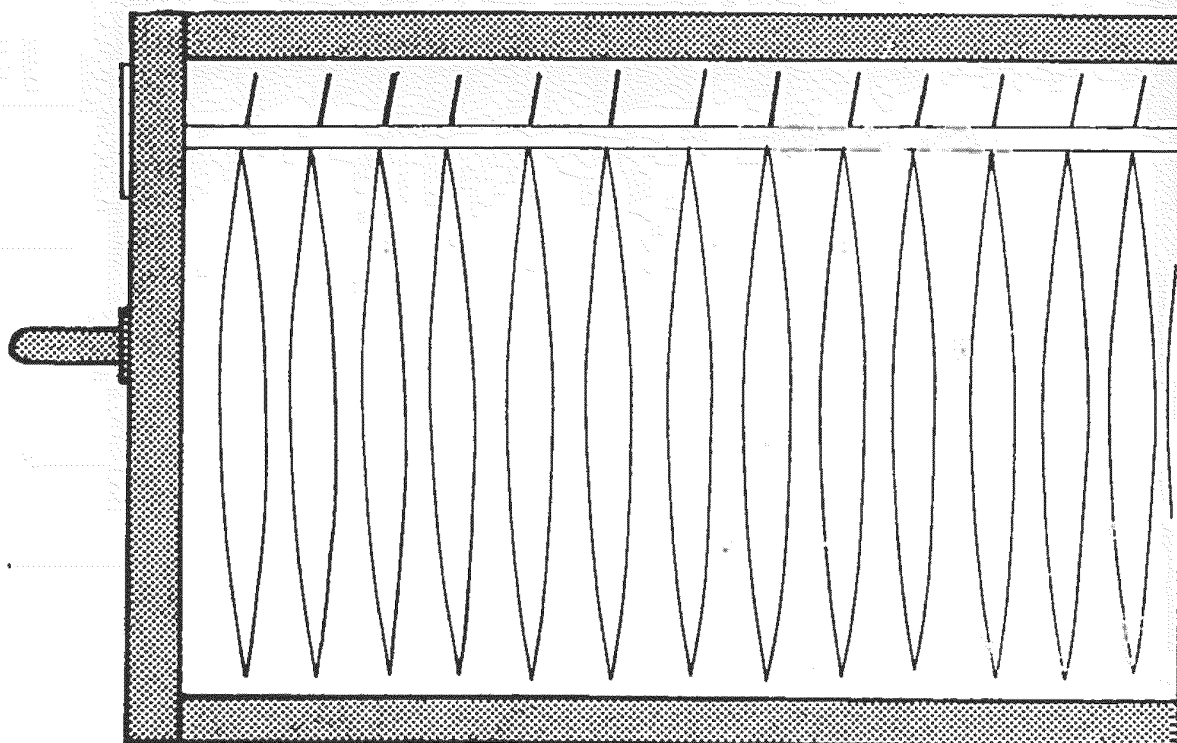


# **MODERN FILES AND PAPERS**

## **APPRAISAL AND DISPOSAL PROCEDURES**

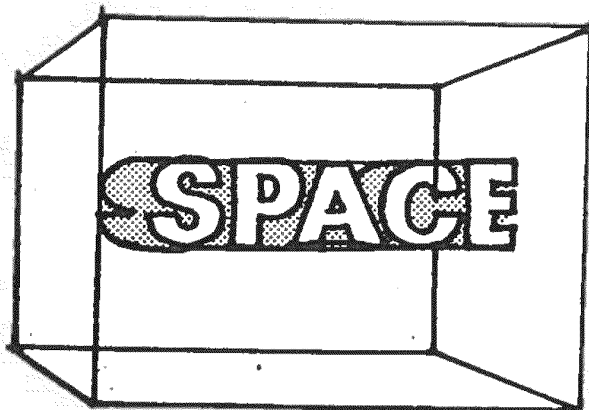


**PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND**

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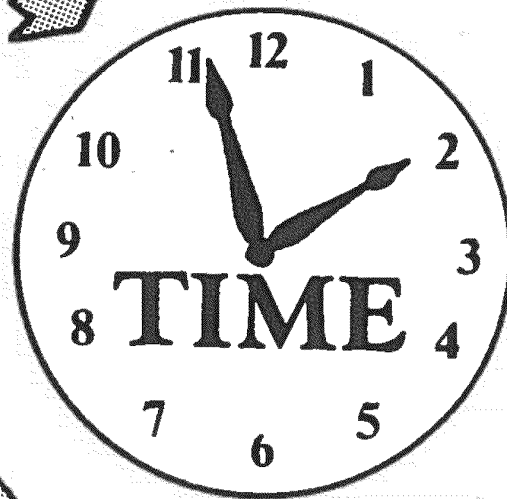
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# A Records Appraisal Programme saves...



*Records not required frequently are removed from the office.*

*Files separated off from inactive records are more easily found.*



## EQUIPMENT

*Bulky filing cabinets and racks are no longer necessary when branches keep only current files.*

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

- i. The function of the Public Record Office is to act as a Common Services Unit receiving from Departments, or bodies associated with them, those papers that must be permanently kept as records. The object is to relieve Departments of the burden of providing long-term storage accommodation for these permanent records and to make them readily available to the depositing Department. In exceptional cases storage can be provided for papers awaiting destruction.
- ii. A further and important function is to make available to the public those records which are open to inspection but *records do not automatically become open to the public when transferred to the Public Record Office* (see para. 13).
- iii. The Public Record Office is responsible for advising Departments on the historical value of their papers and for ensuring that in the selection of records for permanent preservation due weight is given to historical criteria. For this purpose the Public Record Office will, where necessary, obtain the advice of outside academic specialists.
- iv. An Archivist in the Public Record Office is designated as Records Administration Officer and is responsible to the Deputy Keeper of the Records for liaison with Departments on matters concerning their papers.

### 2. SCOPE OF THE PROCEDURES

All papers created in or received in a Government Department are within the scope of the appraisal and disposal procedures. This includes all files, books and papers in a Department and all maps, plans, drawings, sketches or similar papers in professional and technical sections.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SELECTION OF PAPERS FOR RETENTION

Responsibility for the selection and transfer to the Public Record Office of papers worth preserving permanently as records rests with the Department concerned. This selection is done in close consultation with the Public Record Office. It is an essential requirement of this scheme that this process of selection and transfer should be continuous and that Departments should transfer regular annual increments of records to the Public Record Office.

### 4. DEPARTMENTAL RECORD OFFICERS

In each Ministry an Officer, usually a Deputy Principal in Establishment Branch, has been appointed Departmental Record Officer. He is responsible under the Establishment Officer for the care of all of the Department's papers, whether registered or unregistered, from the time they are created or received until they are disposed of either by

destruction or by transfer as records to the Public Record Office. He controls, or at least knows the whereabouts of, all papers in the Department and is responsible for the proper working of this scheme in his Department.

Records Appraisal  
moves Records out of  
high cost office space  
and  
equipment...



...and  
makes  
filing and  
finding **EASIER,**  
**FASTER, BETTER!**

## SELECTION PROCEDURES

### 5. APPRAISAL AND DISPOSAL

The object of the appraisal and disposal procedures is to ensure that a uniform standard is maintained from Department to Department and that a positive decision to preserve or destroy is taken on every paper or file created. Under the procedures, files and papers are disposed of in one of four ways.

#### 1. By First and Second Review System

With the exception of the three types of papers dealt with in paras. (ii)-(iv) below, all papers and files, are dealt with under the system of First and Second Review. To allow this to work a limit must be set on the *active* life of every file and this limit should be five years. *Five years after the opening of a file it should be closed.* (Continuation files can of course be opened where necessary.)

##### *The First Review*

This takes place five years after the file has been closed. The procedure is simple. The Registry brings forward the file to the Officer concerned with its subject. A standard printed minute sheet placed on the file by the Registry asks the Officer to decide whether the file is to be destroyed or preserved. His decision is based purely on Departmental requirements. He need not concern himself with the needs of the Public Record Office. Those files not considered of any further value for the Department's own purposes are destroyed at this First Review without reference to the Public Record Office. The reason for this is that it is considered that a file or paper which a Department does not wish to retain for Departmental purposes longer than five years is unlikely to have value for future academic research. Any files which are retained at this First Review will come forward later for a Second Review.

##### *The Second Review*

This takes place 20 years after the date of creation of the file. It is conducted by the Department and the P.R.O. working in conjunction. At this Second Review the Public Record Office's assessment of the value of papers for academic research is important. Therefore the decision as to preservation is a joint one by the Department and the Public Record Office. Whatever either party wishes to preserve at Second Review is preserved, and transferred to the Record Office.

#### ii. By Special Preservation List

In order to reduce the number of files and papers which have to be Reviewed individually by departmental officers, all groups of files and papers which can be defined clearly and easily, and which Departments or the P.R.O. decide must be preserved



*permanently* are placed on a 'Preservation List'. Without further Review they are transferred to the Record Office when they are 20 years old. Only clearly identifiable and important classes are listed for Preservation in this way.

111. By Special Destruction List

In order to avoid unnecessary Reviewing of obviously useless papers and files all groups of papers, the useful life of which can be easily predetermined and which can therefore be discarded without detailed scrutiny, are placed on a 'Destruction List'. This Destruction List is compiled by each Department in consultation with the Public Record Office. These lists contain only easily identifiable ephemera (*eg* applications for leave, vouchers, travelling claims, *etc*). Types of papers and files on the Destruction List by-pass the First and Second Review System and go straight for destruction after a specific period as stated on the List. A file or paper covered by a Destruction List is destroyed at the appropriate date by the Registry without reference to the Branch concerned and must therefore be readily identifiable throughout its life.

iv. As Particular Instance Papers

Some classes of files and papers which deal with the same subject but relate to hundreds of different people or businesses need special treatment. Such papers have become known as Particular Instance Papers. They present a separate problem and require separate treatment. P.I.P's. can be defined as papers dealing with the same subject but relating to different persons, bodies or places; *eg* Census Returns, Farming Grants files, personal establishment files, sickness benefit files, *etc*. They are a very mixed group, some are very important and some trivial. Decisions on their disposal often require expert advice from statisticians and specialist researchers. The Department and the P.R.O. between them decide whether a class of P.I.P's. should be destroyed, preserved in toto, or whether some sound statistical sample will suffice.

6. REGISTRY MEASURES TO FACILITATE REVIEWING

The aim is to have a system which will enable regular reviews to be carried through automatically with the minimum work for staff or registries. Four practical steps should be taken by registries.

- a. As previously stated, all files must be closed after five years and *new papers must not be added after this date*. Registries have 'Closed' rubber stamps and printed notices to place in Closed Files so that staff will be clearly informed when they requisition a Closed File to obtain information from it.
- b. The date of the earliest and latest papers on each file must be clearly shown on the file cover. The design of all new file covers will eventually incorporate boxes for this information.

- c. The title of every file should accurately reflect its contents because regular and efficient reviewing is impossible if all the papers in each file have to be looked through in order to discover what the file is really about.
- d. Closed files must not be re-registered under a new reference number. When a new file series is created existing related files should be closed and continuation files opened under the new reference number.

# DESTROY



*Records which have reached the destruction age specified in the destruction list.*

*Ephemeral papers such as superseded directives and circulars, leave applications, vouchers, travelling claims, attendance sheets, stationery requisitions etc.*



## SPECIAL TYPES OF RECORDS

7. There are inevitably certain Departmental papers which may escape Review. For example the following are five groups which require special care.

1. Unregistered Files should not be used for any papers. If however, they are used for administrative reasons and are retained for five years, they should become registered papers at the 'First Review'.

### 11. Security Classified Papers

The Departmental Record Officer makes special arrangements for those classes of papers which because of their importance or security classification or for some other reason must be excepted from the arrangements made for the Department's papers in general. However, even papers with a security classification should be subject to First and Second Review. The Review provides an opportunity to reduce or abolish the security classification where this is possible and where the papers are judged to be worthy of preservation.

### 111. Papers of Commissions and Committees

These should be dealt with immediately after the Commission has finished its work. The Departmental Record Officer and the Record Administration Officer at the Public Record Office should be informed of the existence of a Commission or Committee in the later stages of its work and will give guidance to the Secretary on the disposal of its records. It will probably be desirable to retain permanently a complete set of the papers prepared for the Committee and minutes of its meetings. The remaining papers can usually be divided into three categories: (a) for destruction forthwith; (b) for destruction without further examination after a stated period; or (c) for final review after a stated period. The grouping of the papers in this way should be done during the lifetime of the Committee by the Secretary who knows the significance of the individual papers but in consultation with the Departmental Record Officer and the P.R.O. As a rule one complete set of papers is retained by the Department providing the Secretary and is transferred as records to the Public Record Office.

### 1v. Photographs, Sound Recordings and Films

It should be clearly understood that photographs, sound recordings and films held by Departments are public records. As special storage conditions are necessary for these items and as old film can be dangerous, arrangements for their review and/or permanent preservation, should be made by the Departmental Record Officer in consultation with the Public Record Office which has a special arrangement with the National Film Archive.

v. Printed or Circulated Papers

The Departmental Record Officer should ensure that a standard set is maintained of any printed or processed compilations issued by the Department. (including parts from time to time superseded by amendments). Such sets should be treated as records. This applies to codes of procedure, directories, organisation charts and the like produced for purely official use, and also to compilations which have a wider circulation or are actually published, such as annual reports or official handbooks.

# RECALL



*Files recalled from Public Record Office stores will be returned to branches by courier within twenty-four hours.*

## TRANSFER PROCEDURES

### 8. RECORD OF PAPERS TRANSFERRED OR DESTROYED

The Departmental Record Officer should maintain a record of papers transferred to the Public Record Office and of papers destroyed. He should also make periodic checks of the files set aside for retention to ensure that not too much is being kept. The Public Record Office should obtain annually from each Department a statement giving particulars of the quantity (in foot-run of shelving) of records destroyed after the First Review and after the Second Review. The Public Record Office is responsible for complying with the statutory provisions designed to inform Parliament of the destruction of records.

### 9. DISPOSAL OF WASTE

To ensure complete destruction, records are normally sent for disposal as confidential waste. There may be occasions when a Department can safely classify records as below 'confidential waste' level. If the bulk is such that it will be financially worthwhile to dispose of it as 'open' waste it may be sold for disposal without any safeguards and may be exported. Management Services Division can advise Departments on this.

### 10. TRANSFER OF RECORDS TO THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Papers selected for permanent preservation should be transferred to the Public Record Office as soon as possible and should be retained by a Department only so long as is administratively necessary and in no case for longer than 20 years after the date of the file. They can however be recalled by Departments for official use and the Public Record Office provides an efficient recall service.

### 11. LIMBO REPOSITORY

When a Department lacks accommodation the Public Record Office, in exceptional cases, will store in its limbo repository papers which (a) have had their First and are awaiting their Second Review or (b) are to be destroyed after a specified period. These papers can be recalled by Departments.

### 12. AVAILABILITY TO THE PUBLIC

Records transferred to the Public Record Office will not be made available for public inspection until such time as the depositing Department may decide in consultation with the Public Record Office. Normally this will be 50 years from the date of the record or of the last paper on the file but Departments may decide on other periods either longer or shorter. There is no statutory right of access by the public in Northern Ireland. In Great Britain access is given after 30 years.

### 13. PROCEDURE FOR TRANSFER OF RECORDS TO THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

- i. In order to assist the cataloguing work of the Record Office a cataloguing scheme for the various series of records which are to be preserved and transferred to the Public Record Office will be drawn up by the Record Office whether or not immediate transfers are contemplated in every case.
- ii. Records transferred to the Public Record Office must be listed in sufficient detail to enable individual items to be identified. The Public Record Office stocks suitable paper for such lists. The preparation of lists, conforming to certain conventions and the Public Record Office reference systems, will be the responsibility of the Department transferring the records.
- iii. On the first occasion on which documents in a particular class of papers are sent to the Public Record Office a general description, including details of relevant statutory provisions and brief explanatory notes, will be placed at the head of the list.
- iv. When papers are to be transferred to the Public Record Office the Departmental Record Officer should consider whether registers and indexes which have been used as a means of reference to these papers in his Department may also be transferred. Alternatively, it may be practicable to have a photocopy made of these registers and indexes for Public Record Office use.

### CONCLUSION

14. There will inevitably be individual problems in Departments which may not be covered by this general memorandum. In cases of difficulty the Departmental Record Officer should first be asked to advise but the staff of the Records Management Section of the Public Record Office are also available to give assistance.

The Records Management Staff at the Public Record Office are Mr S. C. McMenamin (telephone 661621), Mr P. C. J. Radcliffe (telephone 661621 or 63210 ext 2479), and Mrs E. M. Murray (telephone 661621 or 63210 ext 2479).

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