



COMMITTEE ON  
DEPARTMENTAL  
RECORDS

*REPORT*

*Presented by The Chancellor of the Exchequer to Parliament  
by Command of Her Majesty  
July 1954*

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# MINUTE OF APPOINTMENT

We, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Master of the Rolls, hereby appoint:—

The Right Hon. Sir James Grigg, K.C.B., K.C.S.I.,  
The Hon. Denys B. Buckley, M.B.E.,  
S. P. Chambers, Esq., C.B., C.I.E.,  
H. R. Creswick, Esq.,  
Professor J. G. Edwards,  
Mrs. M. M. Gowing,  
Professor H. J. Habakkuk

as a Committee:—

“To review the arrangements for the preservation of the records of Government Departments (other than the records of Scottish Departments and records transmissible to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland) in the light of the rate at which they are accumulating and of the purposes which they are intended to serve; and to make recommendations as to the changes, if any, in law and practice which are required.”

We further appoint Sir James Grigg to be Chairman and Mr. K. H. Clucas to be Secretary of the Committee.

R. A. BUTLER,  
*Chancellor of the Exchequer.*

RAYMOND EVERSLED,  
*Master of the Rolls.*

18th June, 1952.

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## INTRODUCTION

To the Rt. Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer, and  
the Rt. Hon. Sir RAYMOND EVERSLED, Master of the Rolls,

SIRS,

We were appointed by you on the 18th June 1952, as a committee:—

“To review the arrangements for the preservation of the records of Government Departments (other than the records of Scottish Departments and records transmissible to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland) in the light of the rate at which they are accumulating and of the purposes which they are intended to serve; and to make recommendations as to the changes, if any, in law and practice which are required.”

We now have the honour to present our Report.

The first Public Record Office Act, passed in 1838, authorised the establishment of a Public Record Office to provide proper accommodation for the public records\*, and to facilitate the “free use” of them by members of the public. In 1851 the building of the present Public Record Office in Chancery Lane was begun, and in the following year an Order in Council was made bringing the records of Government Departments within the scope of the Act. The number of Departmental records transferred to the Public Record Office grew rapidly, so that in 1877, in order “to prevent the Public Record Office from being encumbered with documents of not sufficient public value to justify their preservation in the Public Record Office”, an Act was passed prescribing a procedure for the destruction of valueless records. These two Acts, together with an amending Act of 1898, are known as the Public Record Office Acts, 1838 to 1898. We describe the history of their enactment in Part I of this Report.

The public records which have so far been transferred to the Public Record Office, and which include records that go back to the Conquest and beyond, occupy just over 200,000 feet (or about 40 miles) of shelving space. It has been estimated that records at present in the possession of Government Departments, but which will ultimately be transferred to the Public Record Office for permanent preservation, will require no less than 600,000 feet of shelving space (or about 120 miles). In other words, if this figure were to be accepted, the amount of preservable material in the hands of Departments today would exceed, by three times to one, the amount of preserved material already in the Public Record Office, though this latter covers a period of very nearly a thousand years. This is no new situation: as we shall show, the amount of material in the hands of Departments and due to be transferred to the Public Record Office has exceeded the amount already there ever since it was established a hundred years ago.

We believe that it should be possible to reduce materially the figure of 600,000 feet of preservable records referred to in the previous paragraph. But even if this is done the situation will remain serious. All papers used in the course of Government administration, whether they are Minutes of meetings of the Cabinet or forms used by members of the public for claiming sickness benefit, are public records. The wide extension of the field of Government business in the twentieth century, and the invention of such devices as the typewriter and the duplicating machine, have increased enormously the number of Departmental records created each year. Few of these will need to be preserved, but their very number greatly complicates

\* We discuss the meaning of this term in paragraphs 1 to 3 of the Report.

the process of deciding which should be preserved, and which destroyed. The procedure for selecting records for preservation specified in the Public Record Office Act of 1877 has proved inadequate to modern conditions. The result has been that useless material has been unnecessarily retained, and papers which ought to have been in the Public Record Office long ago and available for the "free use" of the public are still in the hands of Departments. We describe the present arrangements in Part II of this Report; the longer they are left as they are, the more serious will the situation become—indeed it will soon become practically unmanageable.

We believe that the making of adequate arrangements for the preservation of its records is an inescapable duty of the Government of a civilized state. Not only is this an obligation which in England and Wales is not at present being adequately performed, but we consider that a good deal of the money that is being spent on the existing arrangements is being wasted. We believe that this state of affairs cannot be remedied within the framework of the existing law. In Part III of this Report we therefore make recommendations for changing both the constitutional position of the Public Record Office and the procedure by which records are selected for preservation. Our proposals should not necessitate a big increase in expenditure, but rather enable a better use to be made of existing resources. The extra cost which they will entail will certainly be nothing like the amount which it will become necessary to spend in future years if the position is allowed to deteriorate further.

We have designed our proposals to take into account the varying circumstances existing in different Departments. The needs of current administration will naturally be given priority in Departments over the arrangements to be made for the preservation of their records. At the same time Departments have an obligation to bear in mind that the preservation of Government records is a recognised object of public policy. The precise arrangements to be made by Departments for the preservation of their records will need to be based primarily on the way in which they conduct their current business. For this reason we have not attempted to specify in anything more than the broadest outline the procedure which we consider Departments should adopt for the selection of records for preservation. Our recommendations will, however, entail changes in the methods at present adopted by Departments. In a few isolated Departments whose present arrangements are well conceived this may involve changes which, though certainly not for the worse, may not be very much for the better. But we believe it to be essential, in relation to Departmental records as a whole, that these changes should be made. We would suggest, too, that the opinion which a Department may hold of the merits of its present arrangements may not always be shared by outside observers. We have found, for example, that the Department which seems to be most satisfied with its existing arrangements has in its possession unsorted papers going back to the eighteenth century—a state of affairs which, so far as we are aware, exists in no other Department.

The effect of our recommendations should be to ensure that there is a steady flow of records from all Government Departments to the Public Record Office, and that (with the exception of any which it is necessary to treat as secret documents for a further period of years) these will be made available for public inspection 50 years after their creation. The advantages of these arrangements will be felt by Government Departments, the Public Record Office, and, not least, by historians and other users of the public records. Departments will have storage space regularly released, the Public Record Office will be able to plan in advance the provision of

accommodation, and historians and other users of the records will obtain a regular flow of new material. We believe that it will be possible for these advantages to be enjoyed only through the adoption of the procedure which we recommend for selecting records for preservation. We think it desirable that users of the public records should be aware of this, and should realise the administrative problems that selection must involve for Departments. We would emphasize, too, that it is of much greater advantage to the historians for records to be selected in a way that is administratively workable than by methods which, though theoretically offering every safeguard against the destruction of valuable material, in fact provide no safeguards at all because they cannot be operated properly.

In Part IV of this Report we discuss the arrangements for the preservation of Government films, photographs, and sound recordings. Our recommendations are summarised in Part V.

The last inquiry into the arrangements for the preservation of public records was undertaken by the Royal Commission on Public Records, appointed in 1910. The Royal Commission's terms of reference were wider than ours, and their three Reports voluminous. The Appendices to these Reports have rightly been called "an authority of the first rank for the whole history of the Public Records in modern times". We acknowledge our debt to them, and have made no attempt to emulate them. The arrangements for the preservation of the records of the courts of law, records transmissible to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland, local records, and the records of nationalised industries are outside our terms of reference. We have interpreted our terms of reference so as to exclude also the consideration of such items as the methods of protecting documents in the Public Record Office from decay: these raise technical problems with which we are not qualified to deal. We have, on the other hand, paid far more attention than our predecessors to the administrative problems involved in the arrangements for the preservation of records.

In the course of our inquiries we have held 24 full meetings of the Committee, and a number of sub-committee meetings and informal consultations. We have received written evidence from 70 Government Departments and oral evidence from 24. We have also, through the courtesy of their missions in London, been given information concerning practice in a number of other countries, and Mr. Chambers and Professor Habakkuk have visited the United States on our behalf to examine the arrangements made for the preservation of records in that country, and, in particular, the extent to which it has been found practicable to use microphotography in order to reduce the amount of space required to store records. A list of the organisations from which we have received evidence is given at Appendix I. In general, we have not asked for formal statements of evidence. There can be no representative body entitled to speak on behalf of all users of the records, nor is it possible to focus the needs of any considerable number of them. We have therefore felt it preferable to consult a number of individuals who make use of the records, relying on the diversity of our own interests and experience to ensure that all points of view were adequately represented. Some of these individuals have given their views to us as a Committee; others in informal conversation, or on the occasion of a meeting held to discuss the subject at the Institute of Historical Research, of which Professor Edwards is the Director.

We should like to express our thanks to all those who have assisted us in the course of our inquiries. Our particular thanks are due to Sir Hilary

Jenkinson, C.B.E., Deputy Keeper of the Records,\* and Mr. J. Collingridge, O.B.E., who has acted as liaison officer to the Committee on behalf of the Public Record Office; to Mr. J. R. Simpson, C.B., until recently Director of Organisation and Methods, Mr. K. S. Jefferies, and other members of the Organisation and Methods Division of the Treasury; and to all those Departmental officers, from Permanent Secretaries to registry clerks, who have answered our questions so patiently.

## PART I—LAW AND PRACTICE

### The "Public Records"

1. The relationship between law and practice in the present arrangements for the preservation of the records of Government Departments is so complex that it can properly be understood only in the light of the history of the subject over the past hundred and fifty years. The study of this is itself made more difficult by the fact that during this period the meanings of words have changed. Departmental records are part of the "public records". "What exactly is meant by 'Public'", the present Deputy Keeper of the Records has written, "no one seems to have thought it worthwhile to define: it is assumed always that although we may speak of Records of all kinds as being 'of a public character', 'Public' . . . when used as part of a title refer[s] only to Documents accumulated by . . . the Central Government"<sup>1</sup>. "Records" the Deputy Keeper has stated to be synonymous with "archives", a term which he has defined as meaning "Documents drawn up for the purpose of, or used during, the conduct of affairs of any kind, of which they themselves formed a part, and subsequently preserved by the persons responsible for the transactions in question, or their successors, in their own custody† for their own reference"<sup>2</sup>. For our own purposes it will be convenient to modify this definition slightly. The Public Record Office is the "successor" of the Courts and Departments which originated the documents it holds, many of which owe their continued retention, not to the needs of their originators or their successors, but to their potential interest to historians. To avoid the need to describe the Public Record Office as a repository of ex-records we shall therefore, in our own use of the term "records", exclude the words "for their own reference" from the definition. Subject to this reservation we accept the Deputy Keeper's description of the "public records" as "the Archives of the Central Government of this Country". This is the way in which the term is generally understood to-day, and it is the way in which we shall ourselves use it in this Report.

2. It has not always had this meaning. The modern Courts of Law and Government Departments are descended from a common ancestor, namely the royal "Curia" or Court of the eleventh century; the judicial and executive functions of the Crown do not become clearly distinguishable until the thirteenth century. In 1800 a Member of Parliament presented a motion in the House of Commons "that a Committee be appointed to enquire into the Public Records of this Kingdom and of such other public instruments, rolls, books, and papers, as they shall think proper"<sup>3</sup>. It is clear, from the speech he made, that by "records" he meant "Curial" and legal documents; e.g. reports of court proceedings, "decrees relating to tithes, boundaries, customs and other rights"<sup>4</sup>, and accounts of taxes

\* Sir Hilary Jenkinson retired from this office on 10th April, 1954.

† This use of the word "custody" must not be confused with its use in the specialised sense referred to in paragraph 5 below.

paid or owing. These records were "public" because they were open for all to see. The mover of the motion stated that, "In some of the very first petitions upon the rolls of parliament, the public records of the kingdom are emphatically styled the people's evidences, and it is ordained that they shall be made accessible to all the king's subjects"<sup>5</sup>. The people's right of access to them sprang from the fact that they were often the only place in which the legal rights of individuals were recorded. The change from this use of the term "public records" to the modern use was gradual, and in the process the two uses were often confused. As late as 1871 the then Deputy Keeper of the Records said that it was a mistake to think that "all the Papers and Documents deposited in the Public Record Office are Public Records". He added that "many of the Papers and Documents belonging to . . . Government Departments are not open to the public; because, although preserved in the Public Record Office, they do not come within the provisions of the Public Records Act"<sup>6</sup>. Modern law and practice concerning the public records derives from action taken between 1838 and 1852, which both suffered from, and was a cause of, this confused use of terms. This fact, together with a general laxity in the use of words during the same period, has helped to make the present position more complicated than it might otherwise have been.

3. Thus the term "records", which in 1800 was used to refer only to legal\* documents, has by 1954 come to mean documents both legal and administrative; and the term "public", which was formerly used to denote accessibility, refers now to documents accumulated by the central Government, irrespective of whether there is any general right of access to them. The historical account which we give in the next succeeding paragraphs is also in effect an account of the way in which the term "public records" lost its 1800 meaning, and acquired the meaning which it has to-day.

4. The Committee which was appointed as a result of the motion of 1800 was required "to report to the House the nature and condition" of the records specified in paragraph 2 above, "together with what they shall judge fit to be done for the better arrangement, preservation, and more convenient use of the same"<sup>7</sup>. In its Report, the Committee listed all the places in England and Scotland where records were deposited including those in the custody of clerks of the peace, local courts, cathedrals, universities and public libraries. Within a fortnight of the Report's being presented to Parliament, it had been debated in the House of Commons and the first of six successive Record Commissions appointed. The main work of these Commissions was to collect information and to publish copies of selected records. They had no power to control the keepers of the various repositories or to make provision for the better custody of the records, though they were, in fact, severely criticised for not doing these things. In 1836, after charges of dereliction of duty and financial mismanagement had been made, a Select Committee was appointed to inquire into the "management and affairs of the Record Commission and the present state of the Records of the United Kingdom"<sup>8</sup>. This Committee expressed the opinion that "the most important business which falls within the province of those who are entrusted with the management of records is that of their proper custody. The first and most obvious defect in the present system is that the records are deposited in different and widely scattered buildings, and entrusted to a multitude of imperfectly responsible keepers". The Committee therefore recommended the provision of a general Record Office "into which all the records of the country

\* The term "legal" should be read so as to include "Curial" records, unless the context requires otherwise.

might be collected . . . as the first and perhaps most essential step for the improvement of the present system". This report provided the foundation for the Public Record Office Act of 1838.

#### **Public Record Office Act, 1838**

5. In this Act, "records" were defined as meaning "all Rolls, Records, Writs, Books, Proceedings, Decrees, Bills, Warrants, Accounts, Papers and Documents whatsoever of a public Nature belonging to Her Majesty, or now deposited in any of the Offices or Places of Custody" mentioned in the Act. The immediate effect of the Act was limited to the Records of Chancery and records deposited in certain named places. These places were those at which were deposited records subsisting from the period before the executive work of the Crown came to be dealt with separately from its judicial work ("Curial" records), and the subsequently accruing records of the Courts of Law. It seems clear that, despite the wide definition given to the term "records", the promoters of the Act intended to make no provision for the papers of Government Departments, and had only legal records in mind. The aim of the Act was to place these records under unified control, in order to improve the way in which they were kept and to give the public better access to them. The intention was that a single repository should be provided under the care of the Master of the Rolls in which all the records would be deposited. In the interval between the passing of the Act and the provision of a suitable repository the Master of the Rolls was to be given a general oversight of the records wherever they might be housed. These two kinds of responsibility were distinguished in the Act by the use of the terms "in the custody of", and "under the charge and superintendence of" the Master of the Rolls.\*

6. The Act required the Treasury to provide "such suitable and proper or additional Building or Buildings" as might be required to house the records which the Act placed "in the legal Custody of" the Master of the Rolls. The Master of the Rolls was himself required, with the approval of the Sovereign, to appoint a Deputy Keeper of the Records to act as Chief Record Keeper and be responsible for superintending all persons employed in keeping those records which were "in the custody of" the Master of the Rolls. As soon as possible after the appointment of the Deputy Keeper, a Public Record Office was to be established and all persons employed in the care of records "in the custody of" the Master of the Rolls, whether these were deposited in the Public Record Office or not, were to be taken to be employed in the Public Record Office. The Master of the Rolls was empowered to make rules for the management of the Office and for prescribing the terms under which members of the public could be given access to the records deposited in it. The only records to be placed in the immediate legal "custody" of the Master of the Rolls were the Records of Chancery, for which, as Master of the Rolls of Chancery, he was already responsible; but, as explained in paragraph 8 below, machinery was provided for other records to be transferred later.

7. The Act placed under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls "the Records belonging to Her Majesty which now are, or ought

\* As originally drafted the Bill placed all records "in the custody of" the Master of the Rolls, the concept of "charge and superintendence" being introduced during the passage of the Bill through Parliament. The Act as finally passed bears evidence of having been imperfectly amended to take account of this. An obvious example is that Section 1 of the Act, which places certain records under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls, bears the side-title, "Records to be in the Custody of the Master of the Rolls". The curious provision referred to in the final sentence of paragraph 7 below is the result of an amendment introduced in the House of Lords, the relevant section as originally drafted referring to records "in the custody of" the Master of the Rolls.

to be, deposited" at several named places. The Master of the Rolls was empowered to issue such Orders as he might think fit for cleaning, repairing, preserving, and arranging the records under his charge and superintendence, and to order that any particular records should be moved from one place of custody to another. He was also empowered to issue Orders for the making of calendars, catalogues, and indexes for these records. After the establishment of the Public Record Office any place at which records which were under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls were deposited was to be accounted a "Branch or Part" of the Public Record Office.

8. The Master of the Rolls was required, by the issue of a warrant countersigned by the Lord Chancellor, and with the approval, in appropriate cases, of the Judges or Commissioners concerned, "from time to time" to order the transfer into his "custody" of any of the records which the Act placed under his charge and superintendence. The Act also provided that "Records belonging to Her Majesty" other than those specified in the Act could be brought under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls by Order in Council. They would then become subject to the provisions of the Act as if they had been deposited at one of the places named in it.

9. Four months after the passing of the Act a Deputy Keeper had been appointed, and in 1840 the Treasury approved the establishment of the Public Record Department. Within the next two years the Master of the Rolls took into his "custody" by warrant the records deposited in nine repositories referred to in the Act. These he concentrated into six repositories, which, together with an administrative office set up in the Rolls House itself, became for the time being the "Public Record Office". After consideration had been given to a number of alternatives, including suggestions by the Treasury that the records should be housed in the Palace of Westminster—either in the Victoria Tower or in the roofs of the new Houses of Parliament—it was agreed that a general repository should be built on the site of the Rolls Estate in Chancery Lane. This site had first passed into the possession of the Master of the Rolls in 1377. The building was begun in 1851 and the first part completed five years later. Various additions were made during the course of the next fifty years. Since 1855, when records were first moved into the new building, the repository at Chancery Lane, together with one or more branch repositories, has formed the "Public Record Office".

10. By a series of warrants issued at intervals during the thirty years following the passing of the first Public Record Office Act, the Master of the Rolls took into his legal "custody" all those records which the Act had placed under his charge and superintendence. Records which have accrued since then in the courts of law have been transferred into the "custody" of the Master of the Rolls from time to time and in similar fashion. Thus, with the exception of those currently accruing legal records for which warrants have not yet been issued, and which, though in the custody of the courts, are under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls, all legal records of the courts are now in the legal "custody" of the Master of the Rolls, and housed at the Public Record Office.

11. As we have stated in paragraph 5 above, we believe that the Act of 1838 was not intended to make provision for housing the papers of Government Departments. In 1578 a State Paper Office had been established to house the papers of the Secretary of State's Office which at about that time grew out of the Secretary's Office. The accumulated papers of other Government Departments were (or were supposed to be) in the immediate charge

of the Departments themselves. The two most important of these Departments, the Treasury and the Admiralty, had in their possession legal records which by the Act of 1838 were brought immediately under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls, and both seem to have seen in the creation of the Public Record Department a means of disposing of some of their other papers as well.

12. One of the six repositories forming part of the first "Public Record Office" was the Tower of London, in which were housed a number of the records of the High Court of Admiralty. In 1841 the Assistant Keeper in charge of the Tower Repository drew the attention of the Master of the Rolls to the existence in an Admiralty building at Deptford, which was about to be pulled down, of "various important documents belonging to the Navy Board and Admiralty . . . which it was desirable to preserve under the powers of the Act"<sup>10</sup>. The Master of the Rolls reported this to the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty who replied that they were "willing to avail themselves of the opportunity of placing the several documents at Deptford at the disposal and in the custody of the Master of the Rolls"<sup>11</sup>. The documents in question consisted of despatches and letter books of various dates between 1688 and 1818, and were thus undoubtedly administrative documents. It may be, however, that the Master of the Rolls took the view that they "ought" to have been deposited at the Tower with other Admiralty records and so were caught by the provisions of the Act. Whether this was so or not, they were transferred to the Tower repository (though as no warrant was issued they were not taken into the legal "custody" of the Master of the Rolls). A precedent for the handing over of Departmental papers to the Master of the Rolls was thereby established.

#### **Agreement of 1845-6**

13. In 1842 the Secretary to the Treasury wrote to the Master of the Rolls asking him to "depute a qualified person belonging to the Record Establishment, to report upon the state of the old Records of the Treasury, with a view to enable my Lords to determine whether it would be advisable to transfer them to your Lordship's Department"<sup>12</sup>. It is clear, from the Report that ensued, that this request was made with "the purpose of relieving the [Treasury] Offices of their present burden"<sup>13</sup>, "because", it was suggested later, "the confusion had become unbearable"<sup>14</sup>. The Report was completed in 1845, and in forwarding it to the Treasury the Master of the Rolls accompanied it with a letter of first-class importance. "With a view to assist their Lordships", he said, "in the consideration of the question, whether any of these letters and papers can properly be transferred to the General Record Office,\* I beg leave to state, for the information of their Lordships, my view that in the management of any documents and papers which may be transferred from the Treasury or any other Government Office, the General Record Office ought to be merely auxiliary or subservient to the respective offices to which the documents and papers respectively belong; and for that purpose that it would be the duty of the General Record Office:—

To take charge of such records and papers as each office might think proper to transfer, either because they were not required for the current business of the office, or because they could not be conveniently accommodated within the office:

\* It will be observed that within a period of seven years the Public Record Office had also acquired the designations "Public Record Department", "Record Establishment", and "General Record Office". For convenience we shall ourselves henceforth use the term "Public Record Department" to refer to the Department, and the term "Public Record Office" to refer to the repository provided and administered by the Department.

To keep the records and papers belonging to each office distinct from all other records and papers :

To arrange them, and cause proper calendars and indexes of them to be made :

To hold them for the special use of the offices to which they respectively belong :

To make searches or transcripts whenever required for the use of Government or Parliament :

To transmit the originals to the office from which they came, if and whenever required for the use of the office :

And to afford access and inspection to the public or to individuals, only in pursuance of orders given by the head of the office from which they came, or some other person authorised by him : or in pursuance of general or special rules approved by him."

In the following year the Secretary to the Treasury replied, "My Lords entirely approve of the principles and rules proposed by your Lordship for the management of documents transferred from Government offices to the Record Department, and they request that these rules may be applied to the present and every future case in which such transfers may take place"<sup>15</sup>.

14. The quantity of Departmental papers, mainly from the Treasury and the Admiralty, transferred to the Public Record Office after this statement of principles had been agreed, increased rapidly. In 1847 the Master of the Rolls declared that he "conceived it to be the duty of the Public Record Office to take charge of all valuable Public Documents which the Offices to which they respectively belong may desire to have perpetually preserved as Public Muniments"<sup>16</sup>. In 1850 the Deputy Keeper of the Records reported that the amount of Departmental papers which had been transferred in the previous two years, or the transference of which was then contemplated, was so large that it would probably nearly fill the whole of the first block of the new Repository being built at Chancery Lane<sup>17</sup>.

15. In 1845, as a result of a shortage of accommodation in the State Paper Office, the Treasury decided that when a sufficient period had elapsed to confer a "historical" character on particular classes of documents deposited in the State Paper Office, they should be transferred to the Public Record Office. The relationship between the offices of the Secretaries of State and the Public Record Department in respect of these papers was to be the same as those proposed earlier in the year concerning papers transferred from other Departments direct to the Public Record Office. In 1848 a Treasury Minute was issued stating that "as . . . Parliament has made provision for the whole of the State or Public Records of the country being brought under one central management"<sup>18</sup>, the Treasury had decided that, on the retirement of the present Keeper of the State Papers, the State Paper Office should be merged in the Public Record Department under the Master of the Rolls. It was evidently considered that these changes were within the prerogative powers of the Treasury to make, and did not require any statutory authority. On this basis the way was now clear for the Public Record Office to accommodate the non-current papers of all Government Departments on the lines of the exchange of letters between the Master of the Rolls and the Treasury in 1845-6.

#### **Order in Council, 1852**

16. In December 1851, however, the Deputy Keeper of the Records wrote to the newly appointed holder of the office of Master of the Rolls pointing

out the informality of these arrangements and raising doubts as to their legality. He suggested that an Order in Council should be made, to bring Departmental papers under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls, and so subject to the provisions of the 1838 Act. Such an Order was desirable also, he suggested, to enable documents to be transferred in an orderly manner, and not, as the 1845-6 agreement allowed, at the whim of Departments. "The Master of the Rolls", he said, "is at present, or will be, merely a Store-keeper, warehousing the Documents on behalf of the Crown or for other Public Departments, who if they think fit, may deal with them at their pleasure, notwithstanding their deposit in the Public Record Office." He suggested also that, as a matter of still greater importance, an Order was required to confirm the Treasury Minute of 1848 transferring papers in the State Paper Office to the Public Record Office<sup>19</sup>. An Order in Council was duly made in March 1852 placing "all Records belonging to Her Majesty" other than those already catered for in the 1838 Act under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls, and so subject to the provisions of the Act.

17. The status of Departmental records (as we shall now call them), and the powers of the Master of the Rolls concerning them, were thus materially changed. But from the Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Records for 1852 it is clear that it was intended that things should go on as before. "The Order", he said, "which your Majesty has been pleased to make . . . will have to be called into effect . . . when and as Your Majesty, or the Lords Commissioners of Your Majesty's Treasury, Your Majesty's Secretaries of State, or other High Officers, or the Heads of Departments having the actual possession of Your Majesty's Public Documents, may issue Your or their commands or directions to the Master of the Rolls concerning the same, thus continuing the practice which has already begun of making transfers of Public Documents. When, therefore, any such future commands or directions concerning the Records within the purview of Your Majesty's Order in Council shall be given, the Master of the Rolls will accordingly receive the same in the new Repository"<sup>20</sup>.

18. In view of this statement, made so soon after the Order in Council was issued, and so contradictory in tone to the Deputy Keeper's letter of December 1851, it may be questioned why the Order should have been made at all. The reason may be deduced from a letter of the Deputy Keeper written in 1849, in which he referred to a "plan entertained for the revocation of the Treasury minute respecting the State Paper Office, and for drawing into the British Museum all the State Papers and other Documents of an analogous description, an object in which certain Officers of the State Paper Office and of the Museum are now co-operating." The plan apparently also envisaged the transfer to the British Museum of all non-legal records then housed at the Public Record Office. It was to be expected, the letter went on, that "the able and influential promoters of the plan will strenuously and consistently pursue this scheme". "Energetic measures" were therefore required. "A Treasury Minute may at any time be rescinded by another Treasury Minute. Documents transmitted by a Treasury Letter may at any time be recalled by another Treasury letter [two sentences transferred verbatim to the Deputy Keeper's letter of December, 1851] and therefore the first step as I submit ought to be to procure an Order in Council ratifying the Treasury Minute relating to the State Paper Office and confirming the Transfers made from the Admiralty, Treasury, and other Government Departments. Until this be done there can be no security"<sup>21</sup>. There was no mention in this letter of the possible illegality of previous transfers of papers, or of the advantages that might be expected to accrue from

increasing the powers of the Master of the Rolls over the records of Government Departments. The Public Record Department was a new Department, and its place in the public esteem had suffered from the reputation for mismanagement acquired by the Record Commissions from which it took over. It is evident that the Deputy Keeper considered that the informal arrangements of 1845-6 and 1848 were insufficient weapons with which to meet the claims of other organisations wishing to assume the responsibility for accommodating the records of Government Departments, and that legal reinforcement was therefore required.

19. Thus the law concerning Departmental records derives from an Order in Council made under the circumstances described above, by virtue of an Act which was probably never intended to apply to them. Since 1852 the Master of the Rolls has been required "from time to time" to order that Departmental records be delivered into his "custody"; in fact he has never done so, and practice remains as it was settled in 1845-6. In law, all records of Government Departments, from the time they are created, are under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls and subject to his direction and eventual "custody"; in practice, they remain at the direction of Departments themselves even when housed in the Public Record Office. In law, Departmental registries are branches or parts of the Public Record Office; in practice, the Public Record Office acts as an extension of Departments. The "public records" of 1954 are not the "public records" with which the Act was intended to deal; designed for legal records, those of its provisions which have not proved suitable for administrative records have in practice been disregarded.

#### **Destruction of Records**

20. The Select Committee appointed by the House of Commons in 1836 to investigate the affairs of the Record Commission recommended that power should be given to the Record Commissioners to destroy worthless documents. "In almost every office", they said, "there are large masses of documents utterly useless to anybody for any purpose. . . . The keeping of these takes up valuable room, and imposes useless trouble. Under proper precautions, the Record Commission would do great service by destroying them"<sup>22</sup>. Almost immediately after the passing of the Public Record Office Act, 1838, the newly appointed Deputy Keeper of the Records sought to be "exempted from taking permanent charge of masses [of documents] which will encumber the general repository, without any advantage resulting therefrom"<sup>23</sup>. The question was put to the Masters in Chancery and the Lord Chief Justice, who gave it as their opinion that no authority existed under which records not considered worthy of permanent preservation could be destroyed. Some few legal records were in fact destroyed under the authority of the second Master of the Rolls to hold office after the passing of the Act, but this was judged by his successor to have been illegal.

21. No such injunction was considered to apply to the records of Government Departments. Soon after the passing of the 1838 Act the Treasury began to make a practice of seeking the advice of the Master of the Rolls as to what records were not worth retaining. In 1848 the Master of the Rolls said he had come to the conclusion that he had no authority to determine what Departmental papers it was proper to destroy. He added that, "in order to prevent the great inconvenience which in process of time must arise from unlimited accumulation", it would be necessary to give the Public Record Department power to destroy useless documents. He proposed that this power should be accompanied by strict regulations designed to secure the greatest caution in its exercise, and to ensure that abstracts or lists were made

of destroyed documents<sup>24</sup>. Despite this expression of opinion by the Master of the Rolls that his powers were limited, Departmental papers continued to be submitted to officers of the Public Record Department for a decision as to their future, and those judged unworthy of retention were destroyed. The Order in Council of 1852 placed Departmental records on the same basis, in so far as the 1838 Act was concerned, as legal records, but the destruction of papers in this way continued. In 1877 the then Master of the Rolls, while holding that the destruction of legal records would be contrary to law, expressed the opinion that he had no power to stop Departments from removing and destroying any of their records housed at the Public Record Office<sup>25</sup>.

22. In 1858 the Master of the Rolls requested the Treasury to authorise the addition of a new wing to the Public Record Office, in order to house the mass of Departmental records that were being transferred to him<sup>26</sup>. The Treasury replied that no money was available, and that even if it were they would not feel justified in authorising further expenditure until satisfied that what had so far been deposited in the Public Record Office was in fact worth preserving<sup>27</sup>. At the Treasury's suggestion, a Committee consisting of representatives of the Public Record Department, the Treasury, and the Departments concerned, examined the papers transmitted by a number of Departments and agreed that about 40 per cent. of them could be destroyed. The work of this Committee did not, however, remove the constant pressure on space, nor relieve the Public Record Department of all the papers that it did not wish to keep. In 1875 the Deputy Keeper, in a memorandum approved by the Master of the Rolls and published as a Parliamentary paper<sup>28</sup>, wrote, "There are extant in the Public Record Department large masses of legal and Government documents which are wholly useless for legal, historical, military, statistical, economical, or official purposes, and of no possible interest to any one. These documents occupy a very large space, and prevent the reception of valuable papers into the Depository (which is at present filled to overflowing). . . . In considering this question it must be borne in mind that, if every species of document or memorandum, preparatory or incidental to an act before it is completed, is to be preserved, there would be no limit to the size of a building sufficient to contain them, and a much larger staff of officers would be required to superintend them. It may be safely asserted that if such papers and documents had been preserved from the Norman Conquest to the present time, a building of ten times the dimensions of the present Depository would be insufficient for them, and really valuable materials for history in all its branches would be swamped and crushed by their surroundings of useless rubbish". The Deputy Keeper therefore proposed that a Committee should be appointed with power to examine and authorise the destruction of records in the Public Record Office, and also "to examine the nature of those documents, both legal and Governmental, which it is proposed to send into the Record Depository, and decide whether they ought to be received". The Committee was to consist of two barristers and one official of the Public Record Department, who would be required to examine each paper<sup>29</sup>, and if all were agreed that any particular document should not be preserved, to recommend to the Master of the Rolls and the office of origin that it should be destroyed. If these recommendations were accepted, an Act of Parliament should then be enacted to authorise the destruction of the documents concerned.

#### **Public Record Office Acts, 1877 and 1898**

23. The power thus sought by the Deputy Keeper to destroy records already in his possession, and to protect himself from the need to accept from Departments and the Courts records which were of no value, was given by the Public

Record Office Act, 1877, though not precisely in the form requested. This Act forms the legal basis of present-day practice. It amended the Act of 1838 so as to empower the Master of the Rolls, with the approval of the Treasury, and, in the case of Departmental records, of the head of the Department concerned, to make rules "respecting the disposal by destruction or otherwise of documents which are deposited in or can be removed to the Public Record Office, and which are not of sufficient public value to justify their preservation in the Public Record Office". These rules were required to be laid before both Houses of Parliament for sixty days,\* after which, unless either House had meanwhile prayed that they should not be approved, they could be brought into effect by Order in Council. Before the power of disposal could be exercised in relation to any documents, the Master of the Rolls was required to "cause a Schedule to be prepared of the documents for the time being proposed to be disposed of, containing a list of the documents", or of classes of documents where these were of a similar nature, "and such particulars as to their character and contents as may be calculated to enable the Houses of Parliament to judge of the expediency of disposing of such documents in the proposed manner". The Schedule had to be laid before both Houses of Parliament for four weeks, after which the documents to which it related could be destroyed. The authority to destroy documents was limited to those created after 1715, but by an amending Act of 1898 this date was changed to 1660.

24. The first rules made under the Act provided for a Committee of Inspecting Officers, composed of members of the Public Record Department, together, in the case of records originating from a Government Department, with an officer of the Department concerned, to examine records already deposited in the Office and to draw up Schedules for their destruction. Other rules empowered Departments to draw up their own Schedules for the destruction of records which had not yet been handed over to the Public Record Office. In 1889 all these rules were superseded by fresh rules which applied both to records in the Public Record Office and to those still in the possession of Departments. These Rules have been subscribed to by virtually all Government Departments, and are in force to-day. They prescribe that a Department which wishes to have authority to dispose of any of its documents must nominate an officer "specially conversant with such documents" to draw up a Destruction Schedule. In drafting the Schedule this officer is required to "take every precaution against the inclusion therein of any documents which can reasonably be considered as of legal, historical, genealogical or antiquarian use or interest, or which give any important information not to be obtained elsewhere". The Schedule and the documents to which it refers must then be inspected by a Committee of Inspecting Officers, the members of which must include the Deputy Keeper of the Records, an Assistant Keeper, and a barrister of not less than seven years standing. Once the Schedule has been "settled", it must be signed by the Inspecting Officers and the Departmental Officer who was responsible for drafting it. As required by the Act, it must then be approved by the Master of the Rolls and the head of the Department concerned. After it has lain before Parliament for four weeks the head of the Department is required to "take measures for the disposal of the documents mentioned". Documents for disposal are to be destroyed, unless the Master of the Rolls decides—and a provision is included in the Schedule to that effect—that they should be handed over to a library. Subsequent rules permit the transfer of documents to the Government of any of "Her Majesty's Dominions" or to a library in one of those dominions.

\* Amended by the Public Record Office Act, 1898, to nine weeks.

25. The effect of these enactments on the records of Government Departments is not entirely clear. Within 18 months of the passage of the 1877 Act the Master of the Rolls declared that the Act did not prevent Departments from destroying records while these were still in their possession, but applied only to records after they had been transferred to the Public Record Office<sup>30</sup>. In the following year, on the other hand, the Treasury expressed the view that the Act applied to all records<sup>31</sup>. The Royal Commission on Public Records, appointed in 1910, entertained "grave doubts as to the propriety" of the action taken to destroy Departmental records after the Order in Council of 1852 and before the Act of 1877<sup>32</sup>. The present Deputy Keeper, however, has expressed the view that if the head of a Department does not "approve" the Master of the Rolls' Rules, "there would be nothing to prevent his Department from destroying at its pleasure, except the power of the Master of the Rolls to issue a warrant in the form laid down by the Act of 1838"<sup>33</sup>. If the embargo on the destruction of legal records, which was thought to exist prior to 1877, sprang from the 1838 Act—and the fact that the 1877 Act is an Act "to amend" the Act of 1838 seems to indicate that its framers thought it did—and this interpretation of the law is correct, then it would appear that neither legal nor Departmental records may now be destroyed except under the authority given by the Act of 1877. Suffice it to say that Departments have in fact subscribed to the rules, and that it is generally accepted by them that their documents may be destroyed only in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Act and the rules made under it.

26. There is, however, one point of interest to make this strange series of enactments even more curious. The Act of 1838, as has been pointed out in paragraph 5 above, defines "records" as meaning "all Rolls, Records, Writs, Books, Proceedings, Decrees, Bills, Warrants, Accounts, Papers, and Documents whatsoever of a public nature belonging to Her Majesty". The Act of 1877, which is to be construed as one with the earlier Act, gives power to destroy "documents", which term is stated in the preamble to the Act to refer to "records and papers". Whether the destruction of (for example) Writs, that has taken place since 1877, is within the law is a matter on which we are happily not required to express an opinion.

## PART II—MODERN DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS

27. Only a small proportion, by bulk, of the papers which are being created to-day, and which under present arrangements will at some time be transferred to the Public Record Office, consists of legal records. The "public records" are thus no longer primarily "the people's evidences" but mainly the records of the administrative activities of the central Government. During the nineteenth century, as we have described, successive Masters of the Rolls and Deputy Keepers of the Records were embarrassed by the large volume of papers presented to them for preservation. The situation facing their twentieth century successors is far more serious. The greatly extended part played by the central Government in the economic and industrial life of the country, together with the advent of the Welfare State, have increased enormously the amount of papers created in the course of Government administration. The twentieth century has seen too the introduction of the typewriter and the duplicator. These two machines, and others like them, have been responsible for a large part of the additional papers created by Government Departments, for not only do they enable copies to be made of single documents where this was not possible before, but they also encourage the creation of documents by reducing the labour of doing so.

28. The Public Record Office contains at present, either in the main repository at Chancery Lane, or in its branch repository at Ashridge Park, records occupying 207,000 feet of shelving space.\* Of these, 82,800 feet are legal records in the custody of the Master of the Rolls, and the remaining 124,200 feet Departmental records, under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls, but at the direction of the Departments from which they have come.† In 1951, in the course of an enquiry conducted by the Treasury, Departments estimated that they had in their possession 450,000 linear feet of non-current material which under present practice would ultimately be transferred to the Public Record Office. An enquiry which we ourselves conducted in 1952 and 1953 has indicated that the amount of current papers created in, or which pass into the custody of, Departments each year, and which, under existing arrangements, will ultimately be preserved for posterity is 14,000 linear feet. (The corresponding figure for legal records is about 250 feet.) Both these figures must be treated with considerable reserve. Each of them represents the total of estimates supplied by Departments themselves, few of which can have found such estimates easy to make. In the first enquiry it was not possible to produce a definition of the term "non-current" which would apply to all Departments, and the figures supplied by Departments are therefore not strictly comparable. Nevertheless, if we estimate that Departmental holdings of current (as distinct from non-current) papers represent on an average the papers of ten years, then, on these figures, material at present held by Government Departments which will ultimately be transferred to the Public Record Office would amount to 590,000 (say 600,000) linear feet. This will be added to at the rate of 14,000 linear feet a year. Even if the margin of error is considerable these figures are sufficiently large to cause very great concern. Not only is there the problem of how to accommodate so vast an accumulation of documents, but there is the danger, in the words of the present Deputy Keeper of the Records<sup>34</sup>, that the historian of the future "may be buried under the mass of his manuscript authorities".‡ We must also not lose sight of the fact that the greater the amount of documents that is retained, the more impossible in years to come will become the task of keeping them in a state of good repair. This problem has already arisen in relation to medieval records: the repair of some of the fourteenth and fifteenth century plea rolls has had to be postponed "to the Greek Kalends, because what might be feasible if only a few rolls were in question becomes impossible when there are something like 300 in the same case"<sup>35</sup>. The result is that these rolls are labelled "Unfit for Production", i.e. "too decayed to be handled except by way of repair". We therefore have no hesitation in saying that the most important requirement in relation to the preservation of modern Departmental records is a satisfactory method of selecting those which ought to be preserved.

#### **Selection of Records for Preservation**

29. In determining which of its documents are to be preserved a Department has to take into account their value to the Department itself, and their potential value to future users of the Public Record Office. The extent

\* It is usual to measure records by the amount of shelving space required to accommodate them, the unit of measurement being the "linear foot".

† There is also, in the Public Record Office, a negligible amount of records placed under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls by the Law of Property Act, 1922, and the Tithe Act, 1936.

‡ This is not a problem which is limited to this country. The Committee of the American Historical Association on the Historian and the Federal Government has drawn attention in a recent report to the "increasingly portentous mass of records", which it considers must be radically reduced in bulk, "whether to permit storage, or to make the records manageable for study".

to which Departments need to refer to papers which are earlier than the immediate past varies in accordance with the nature of the work done by each, but all Departments need to preserve a certain amount of their papers over very long periods, the extent of which cannot be foreseen. In 1950, of the 95,052 documents requisitioned from the shelves of the Public Record Office, 2,152 were at the request of Government Departments. The selection of documents for preservation in accordance with the criterion of administrative usefulness, though requiring skill, need raise no insuperable difficulties. In a Memorandum issued to Departments, the Public Record Office has stated that, "*Provided the work is done before the meaning of the transactions in question has faded from memory, and that it is done by persons having a first-hand knowledge and experience of the executive work of the Department, it should be possible to select with tolerable certainty and without too much trouble the Documents or Documentary series which are to be preserved*" because they are, or may be, required for Departmental purposes. By far the greatest problem in selection is how to determine in advance the potential value of documents to posterity for historical or other non-administrative purposes.

30. The problem is one to which there is no perfect solution. No one can forecast with certainty what papers future historians are likely to consider important. Not even the historian of to-day can do this; it has indeed been said that he is the last person who should be allowed to try, because he would be likely to choose for preservation those classes of documents which furthered his own line of inquiry. A further difficulty is that the usefulness of a document to a research worker often has little to do with the purpose for which it was originally created.

31. The present arrangements for the selection of records for preservation have been set out in paragraphs 23 and 24 above. Under these, the possible historical, economic, sociological, and other non-administrative needs of the future (which for convenience we shall refer to as the "historical" criterion) are taken into account at three stages: in the preparation of the Destruction Schedule; in the examination of it by the Inspecting Officers; and in the execution of the Schedule by Departments. We shall examine each of these stages in turn, and attempt to assess the efficacy of the way in which the historical criterion is exercised at each. We shall then endeavour to draw some general conclusions as to the merits of the present arrangements for the selection of documents for preservation.

#### (a) Preparation of the Destruction Schedule

32. The first step is the drawing up of the Destruction Schedule, for which the Department is itself responsible. The officer who prepares the draft of the Schedule is required to "take every precaution against the inclusion therein of any documents which can reasonably be considered of legal, historical, genealogical, or antiquarian use or interest, or which give any information not to be obtained elsewhere". This is a very considerable requirement to make of an officer who is also supposed to be "specially conversant" with the documents in question, and whose main experience may therefore be expected to have been in duties connected with the executive business of the Department. In a Department whose responsibilities can be narrowly defined, and which have changed little over the years, it may be possible for an officer who has had long experience of handling the Department's non-current papers to acquire some sort of a historical sense, however imperfect it may be. In general practice, however, it is customary for the officer who is responsible for drawing up a Schedule to take into account only the administrative needs of his own Department, and to place

on the Inspecting Officers of the Public Record Department the onus of deciding what types of documents should be excluded from the Schedules on historical grounds.

*(b) Examination by the Inspecting Officers*

33. The Inspecting Officers are required to be not less than three in number, one of whom is to be the Deputy Keeper of the Records, one an Assistant Keeper, and one a barrister of seven years' standing. It is usual for the Committee to consist of the Deputy Keeper and some three or four Assistant Keepers, one or more of whom has so far always been a barrister of the required standing.

34. The Master of the Rolls' rules of 1889 require that Departmental records shall be inspected by the Inspecting Officers, who are required to keep minutes of their proceedings and to "mention therein every document, or class of documents, which they may examine". The Act of 1877 provides that in the preparation of a Destruction Schedule, "where there shall be several documents of the same class or description, it shall be sufficient to classify them, as far as practicable, according to their nature and contents, instead of specifying each document separately". Without this power to classify documents the task of the Inspecting Officers in inspecting documents would be impossible. Since the passing of the Act, however, conditions have changed. Departmental records which are deposited in the Public Record Office are divided for purposes of classification into groups, corresponding with the Departments originating them. The groups are further divided into classes, "corresponding normally with divisions of the work which produced them"<sup>36</sup>. Documents created in Departments used to be arranged, not by subject matter, but by the form or species of the documents themselves. Thus each section of a Department would have its own "In-letter" book and "Out-letter" book, each of which formed a convenient class of documents for record purposes. This method of filing correspondence has long since disappeared in most Departments, and is now replaced by a system under which papers are usually filed together in accordance with the particular piece of business with which they deal. A Department's papers are thus housed in a large number of files. For the Inspecting Officer to examine every individual document, or even every file, would be quite impossible. Where papers are of a kind, such as accounting documents or a series of returns, the nature of the whole can be ascertained by an examination of a few specimens. Where papers are not of this type the officer who prepares the schedule classifies them, usually either under broad subject headings or by the nature of the documents, and the Inspecting Officers leave the examination of individual documents within the various classes to the Departments themselves. The form of classification is affected by the requirement that the list of documents must give "such particulars as to their character and contents as may be calculated to enable the Houses of Parliament to judge of the expediency of disposing" of them. In respect of each class of papers the Schedule specifies the period over which they must be retained before being destroyed. These periods are usually fixed in accordance with the Department's own estimates of the length of time it will be necessary to keep the papers for administrative purposes.

35. Because of their inability to examine every document themselves the Inspecting Officers preface each Schedule with a statement that all the classes of documents will first be examined by a duly qualified officer of the Department concerned, who will withdraw for preservation any document likely to be of value as a precedent or to be of historical or legal importance, or

to be useful for social or economic research. We are advised that the preamble to a Destruction Schedule is not a part of the Schedule and so is without legal force. It does, however, represent a statement to Parliament of the procedure which will be adopted and it would therefore be most improper, and open to challenge in Parliament, if that procedure were not complied with.

36. There is no established machinery in existence whereby the Inspecting Officers, in exercising the historical criterion, may take the advice of historians, economists, or other persons with experience in research. The Deputy Keeper has informed us that the occasions on which the Inspecting Officers have been in doubt as to whether any particular documents should be preserved or destroyed have been few, and that on these they have taken outside advice. The Inspecting Officers, he has said, are heavily burdened, and regular consultation with outside persons as a matter of routine would be a cause of delay. The Inspecting Officers have on a few occasions referred questions for advice to the Interdepartmental Committee on Social and Economic Research. This body was set up by the Government in 1947 as a standing committee "to survey and advise upon research work in Government Departments and in particular (a) to bring to the notice of Departments the potential value for research purposes of the material they collect and to suggest new methods and areas of collection; (b) to advise on how there could be made available to research workers information gathered for their own purposes by the Departments which has potential value as material for research". The Chairman of the Committee is the Registrar General for England and Wales, and its other members, each of whom serves in a personal capacity, consist of a number of Government officials and four non-official members drawn from the Universities. In addition there is a large panel of outside persons who can be co-opted on to sub-committees, as the occasion requires. The Committee regards as its principal function the facilitating of social and other forms of research by suggesting to Government Departments variations in the statistics which they compile (and especially those of them which they publish), and to university faculties the kind of things they can most profitably look for in the way of Departmental information. It was at the suggestion of this Committee that the words "or useful for social and economic research" were inserted in the preamble to the Schedules.

37. In judging of the efficacy of these arrangements it must be borne in mind that, whatever their other qualifications, Assistant Keepers are appointed to the staff of the Public Record Department as archivists. They are selected by a Joint Board consisting of representatives of the Public Record Department and the Civil Service Commission. The archivist's prime concern is with the accommodation and safety of the records entrusted to him; the use that may be made of these records is for him a secondary consideration. It was on these grounds that the present Deputy Keeper of the Records once expressed the view that archivists, like historians, should not be concerned in the selection of records for preservation—a task which should be left to the administrators<sup>37</sup>. In practice, however, it has been found that in the course of their duties at the Public Record Office the Assistant Keepers gain a wide knowledge of the kind of documents to which research workers customarily have resort. Those of us who have frequent recourse to the records in the Public Record Office can testify how extensive is the knowledge which the Assistant Keepers have of the material in their charge, how unfailingly this knowledge is placed at the disposal of research students, and how wide is the understanding of the needs of these research students which the Assistant Keepers have acquired. It would be difficult to find a more practicable method of exercising the historical criterion than to select documents in the light of experience of the use made of earlier documents which have been

preserved. To apply such a method to modern Departmental records, however, is difficult. There are at present in the Public Record Office and open to the public very few Departmental records of a date later than 1902. The nature of Government business in the last fifty years has so changed, and its scope so widened, that the application to its records of knowledge acquired of the uses to which research workers have put records of the nineteenth and earlier centuries is of more than doubtful validity. Much information that could previously be obtained only from official sources is now published; and the methods by which Government business is conducted to-day are matters of which the Assistant Keepers have no direct experience.\*

38. The division of documents into classes for purposes of the Destruction Schedules, however necessary this operation may be, has a number of unfortunate consequences. The trouble which it causes to Departmental staffs who put the Schedules into operation is a matter which we shall consider in paragraph 42 below. It has been customary since 1914 for the Public Record Department to preserve, as part of its own records, specimens from all the classes of documents which are destroyed in accordance with the Schedule. Owing to the artificial nature of the classifications, the specimens retained may be representative only of a small, and that not the most important, part of the work covered by the documents included in the classes that have been destroyed. Moreover, because classification is often by broad subject headings, Departments do not always need to amend their Schedules as the nature of the work done by them changes, for it is often possible to squeeze under the umbrella of the old definition work which may be of a different kind altogether. The obligation to supply the Public Record Department with specimens (usually two papers from each class) has to be discharged only once. The result is that these specimens, though of considerable bulk, are not necessarily representative of the Departmental activities recorded in the classes of documents which have been destroyed.

39. But the main criticism that can be made of these present arrangements is that under them the application of the historical criterion, which Departments leave to the Inspecting Officers, is by them unavoidably transferred back, in its most difficult form, to the Departments themselves. Of this the Inspecting Officers are well aware; they consider that the problem would be solved if Departments employed better quality staff on the work of putting the Schedules into effect.

#### *(c) Execution of the Schedule*

40. Once the Destruction Schedule has been agreed to by the Inspecting Officers it is submitted for approval to the Master of the Rolls and the head of the Department concerned, after which it is laid before Parliament for a period of not less than forty days. Only once so far (in 1943) has any query been raised by a Member concerning a Schedule laid before Parliament. It was then made clear that, although a Schedule may not be implemented until it has been before Parliament for the requisite time, neither House has in fact any power either to amend or reject it.

41. In order to put the Schedule into effect, a Department has to arrange for (a) the examination of its papers with a view to determining in the light of the Schedule whether they are to be retained or destroyed; (b) the destruction of files consisting wholly of documents authorised by the Schedule to be destroyed; and (c) the destruction of individual documents of no

\* Only two of the Assistant Keepers have served in a Government Department other than the Public Record Department.

importance on those files which it is decided to preserve. All these processes are commonly referred to as "weeding". They are, however, quite distinct operations, and the failure to use a nomenclature which will distinguish between them has proved a source of ambiguity not only in the evidence presented to us but also in the Report of the Royal Commission of 1910. To prevent confusion we shall therefore avoid the use of the word "weeding", and refer to these three operations as (a) reviewing, (b) destruction, and (c) stripping. The most important of these operations is the first. Under present arrangements it is complicated by three factors.

42. Firstly, the way in which documents are classified in the Schedules—by reference, in the main, to their subject matter under broad headings—often bears little relation to the way in which these documents accrue in the course of current administration. The form necessary to make a list intelligible to the Houses of Parliament is not necessarily the form best calculated to assist reviewing staff to identify the class to which any particular document (or file) belongs. Because of the difficulties of classification to which we have referred above, many of the terms used in the Schedules are extremely vague. Thus one post-war Schedule refers in various places to "miscellaneous matters", "general papers", "minor matters", and "papers of ephemeral importance". The same Schedule refers, under different class-headings, to "papers considered to be of value", "papers giving essential information", and "main files", all of which are to be preserved.\* Such phrases may be sufficiently precise to inform the Houses of Parliament of the kind of papers which are to be destroyed or retained; but no Department, for current purposes, classifies its papers in terms such as these. As an example of the difficulties which reviewing staffs may have to face, the following class of documents from this same Schedule may be quoted: Insecticides and Fungicides: (a) General questions (to be retained for ten years before destruction); (b) Supply and Distribution (to be retained for ten years); (c) Miscellaneous matters (to be retained for five years). As drafted by the Department this class had a fourth sub-division, "Main papers". This was struck out by the Inspecting Officers who considered that these papers should be preserved. Thus the reviewing staff are left to infer the existence within this class of a fourth category of papers which may not be destroyed. For ourselves we should find it very difficult indeed to differentiate between "main files" (which must be preserved), papers dealing with "general questions" (which may be destroyed after ten years), and papers dealing with "miscellaneous matters" (which may be destroyed after five years).

43. Secondly, the periods for which documents must be retained before they may be destroyed vary from one class of documents to another. Some Departments have standardised the retention periods to coincide with the periods after which the files in question are actually reviewed; in other words, if the Department reviews its papers when they are ten years old and again after twenty years, its Schedule contains two retention periods only, namely ten and twenty years. But the majority of Departments have Schedules in which the retention periods differ widely from one class to another. In consequence, a Department's files may become due for review at widely different times, even though they are of roughly the same age.

44. Thirdly, and most important, the preamble to the Schedules states that a "competent officer" of the Department will examine all classes of documents to be destroyed in accordance with the Schedule, and withdraw for

\* Another Schedule refers under one class-heading to "Papers not of major administrative importance but of more than minor importance".

preservation those containing matter likely to be of historical or legal importance or to be useful for social or economic research. We have already expressed the view that no one, however knowledgeable or intelligent he may be, can forecast with certainty the likely needs of future historians. Even if a Department were to subordinate the needs of current administration to the requirements of possible future users of the Public Record Office to the extent of devoting its best staff to the work of reviewing—a course which no one would advocate—there is no sort of guarantee that the right papers would be preserved. The preamble to the Schedule thus demands from the reviewing staffs a more onerous exercise of judgment than is required of the officer who originally drafted the Schedule.

45. It follows that under existing arrangements the reviewing clerk has first to determine to which class in the Schedule any particular file belongs (a task in which he may be assisted by instructions issued by the Department in amplification of the Schedule). He must then determine whether the necessary retention period in respect of that class of documents has expired. Finally he must exercise in respect of the papers on the file the historical criterion as laid down in the preamble to the Schedule. The effect of these arrangements is to place the major onus for exercising the historical criterion on those least qualified to bear it, namely the comparatively junior officers by whom reviewing work is done. The results have been far from satisfactory. There is no means of determining whether the system is in fact being operated efficiently in any particular case. A Department may be up-to-date with its reviewing, and yet be retaining far too high a proportion of its papers, or be retaining all the wrong ones. The effect of this is unlikely to become apparent for many years. A means of testing efficiency is, we consider, an essential element in any satisfactory system. In our judgment it will be no solution to the problem to leave the present system as it is and employ more highly qualified staff on trying to make it work; the system itself must be changed so that it will in fact be workable. This is not to say that Departments have done all they might to make a success of the present system; but we consider that the ultimate causes of this failure lie in the nature of the agreement reached between the Master of the Rolls and the Treasury in 1845-6.

#### **Effects of the 1845-6 Agreement**

46. Under the terms of the Master of the Rolls' letter of 1845, with which the Treasury subsequently expressed its agreement, the Public Record Department acts as an agency or extension of Departments, which are responsible for ensuring that their records are properly maintained and preserved. The obligation that is thus placed on Departments to have regard to the possible needs of future research workers is an onerous one, and in meeting it Departments gain little advantage for themselves. The main concern of Departments is, quite naturally, with current administration, and the responsibilities of their Ministers to Parliament and the public. No Minister has yet been embarrassed by questions in Parliament on the way in which his Department handles its non-current records. In making arrangements for the preservation of their records, Departments are thus working, in effect, on behalf of the Public Record Department, which is the Department which provides this service to the public. By placing the main responsibility in this matter on persons who have no direct interest in it, the 1845-6 agreement has had a number of undesirable results.

47. As Departments are the sole judges of what to send to the Public Record Office and when, it follows that the preparation of Schedules and the reviewing of documents is work which can easily be postponed. Such

a postponement is liable to occur whenever a Department is hard pressed either by heavier incidence of work or by shortages of staff. The advantage of postponement is that it has no apparent effect on the efficient conduct of the Department's administrative work. A considerable number of Departments have Schedules which are out of date, or which do not fully cover the work they now do. The last War both increased immeasurably the number of documents created in Departments and cut down the amount of reviewing work done. In order to release paper for salvage, a Defence Regulation (which has subsequently been given perpetual force by the Emergency Laws (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1953) was made authorising Departments, after consultation with the Public Record Department, to reduce the retention periods specified in the Schedules. In consequence, considerable quantities of paper were sent for salvage during the war, but it was the intention that only those types of documents should be destroyed which could be identified with sufficient ease and in sufficient numbers to justify the employment of staff in reviewing them. Thus, at the end of the War, many Departments were left with large quantities of documents the reviewing of which was overdue. In some instances, too, additions to a Department's work during the War had made its existing Schedules inadequate to deal with the documents which it then had on hand.

48. Some Departments—though not many—have systems under which reviewing is carried out regularly, and have managed to keep this up to date. All credit is due to them for having done so. In many Departments, on the other hand, reviewing is dealt with piecemeal. The need to give up accommodation, or to move offices from one building to another, has on more than one occasion been the only stimulus to the reviewing of particular sets of documents. Some Departments are aware of the exact extent to which their reviewing of documents is in arrear; others are not, and cannot be, for the variety of retention periods, and the particular methods used by them in the registration of their papers, do not enable them to judge easily which particular documents are at any time due for review.

49. Towards the end of the last War, in order to release accommodation in London and to ensure that the condition of papers was not allowed to deteriorate, it was decided to open a repository to house the non-current documents of those Departments which desired to make use of it. Documents were to be under the control of Departments themselves, but the building was to be in the charge of the Public Record Department, which would thus be enabled to exercise a supervision of the arrangements made by Departments. It was intended that Departments should employ their own staff to review their papers, to destroy those considered unworthy of preservation, and to strip and prepare for transfer to the Public Record Office those files which it was decided to preserve. Such a repository (commonly known as "Limbo") has now been opened at Hayes, Middlesex. It is intended that there shall ultimately be sufficient steel racking available to accommodate in it 800,000 linear feet of records. At present 33 Departments have deposited there 250,000 linear feet of non-current records.\* The provision of this repository, and the existence in other places of repositories belonging to individual Departments, have, we believe, had the effect of encouraging Departments to postpone still further the reviewing of their non-current papers.

50. Thus the combined effect of the war, the existence of enough space in which to house more than a sufficiency of records in the Departments

\* In addition, 100,000 feet of records are at present stored in three temporary repositories. It is intended to close these, and transfer the records to Hayes.

themselves, and the pressure of work on the Civil Service in the immediate post-war period, has been to cause the business of reviewing generally to fall into arrear. To these three factors must be added a fourth—the 1877 Act itself. The procedure under this Act has, we believe, by its very complexity, deterred Departments from getting to grips with the problems involved. Although delay may have no effect on the conduct of the Department's business it has a multiplier factor of its own; for the longer a Department delays the reviewing of its papers the greater in volume do they become, and the farther removed from the memory of those by whom the reviewing will ultimately have to be done.

51. The agreement of 1845-6 is also a reason for the practice, widespread among Departments, of entrusting the work of reviewing to poorer quality staff. Some Departments employ on this work men with a wide experience of the Department's work; but these are exceptions, and in more than one instance the staff concerned will shortly be due to retire, taking its acquired knowledge with it. Departments in general can hardly be blamed if they allocate their better staff to administrative work. The registration of current papers is in many Departments (mistakenly, we believe, for reasons to which we refer in paragraph 79 below) allotted to the less able among their staff. It is not surprising, therefore, if the handling of non-current papers, in many of which the Department itself is no longer interested, fares even worse. The result is that either reviewing staff play for safety and preserve more than is necessary, or they may destroy what should be preserved and preserve what should be destroyed.

52. In so far as the Public Record Department itself is concerned, the 1845-6 Agreement has prevented it from becoming a repository for the National Archives in the true sense. A list of Departments which have records stored in the Public Record Office, and the latest date to which these records relate, is given in Appendix II. The Public Record Department has secured the agreement of Departments which have records stored in the Public Record Office that, with some exceptions, records dated 1902 or earlier shall be open to the public. But it is not true to say that all the records of Government Departments dated 1902 or earlier which have been preserved are now in the Public Record Office.

53. Because the responsibility for the selection and transfer of Departmental records rests with Departments, the Inspecting Officers have not seen it as their duty to co-ordinate the arrangements for determining what is to be preserved. Thus, sets of Minutes of an Interdepartmental Committee, with no attendant written matter, may be preserved in the Public Record Office among the papers of all those Departments which were represented on it. Nor have the Inspecting Officers been consistent in all the decisions they have taken. One Department has been asked to send to the Public Record Office for permanent preservation all its Registry indexes, which take up 220 linear feet a year; another Department has authority in its Schedule to destroy all its indexes after 30 years. More particularly, the Inspecting Officers have not felt called upon to exercise judgments of comparative value. An example of this is shown in the decision taken concerning the records of defunct companies kept in the Companies Registration Office of the Board of Trade. After consulting a number of economists, the Inspecting Officers decided that, in order to reduce their bulk, only the first and last Annual Returns, and every fifth intermediate Return, should be preserved; this entails the preservation of half the total bulk of these records, and requires 900 feet of racking a year. The only persons capable of relating the potential usefulness of any group of papers to the amount

of space required to house them—in other words, of judging whether this was the best use to which an annual addition of 900 feet of racking could be put—were the Inspecting Officers. But because each Department's records are treated as an entity in themselves, calling for *ad hoc* decisions in each case, this question was never even put.

54. It is because there are no arrangements for the orderly and systematic transfer of records to the Public Record Office, and no oversight of the amount of papers that each Department preserves, that it has been impossible to plan in advance the necessary additional accommodation which the Public Record Office requires. Unless this is done, and the attempt made to assess the problem of preservation in terms of the space required, we are convinced that the Public Record Office will continue to be faced with periodic accommodation crises.

#### **Need for Change**

55. The present arrangements for the preservation of the records of Government Departments are governed by an Act of 1838 which we believe was not meant to apply to them, an Act of 1877 which makes the selection of records for preservation about as complicated as it can be, and an agreement of 1845-6 which removes from those responsible for the ultimate preservation of the records a proper oversight of them. To suggest remedies will be our business in the next section of this Report.

### **PART III—PROPOSALS**

#### **1. SELECTION—THE ROLE OF DEPARTMENTS**

56. In paragraph 28 above we have expressed our belief that the most important requirement in relation to Departmental records (once they have served the immediate purpose for which they have been created) is the existence of a satisfactory method of determining which of them should be preserved. In paragraph 29 we have stated that by far the greatest problem in selection is how to determine in advance the potential historical or other non-administrative value of documents to posterity. In seeking remedies for the present state of affairs we therefore turn first to the question of selection, and, within selection, to the problem of the historical criterion. The problem, we have said, is one to which there is no perfect solution; but we believe that it should be possible to improve materially upon the existing arrangements.

#### **Historical Criterion**

57. We have shown that under present practice the historical criterion is exercised at three stages. The Departmental Officer who drafts the Destruction Schedule is required to take "every precaution" against including in it anything which can reasonably be considered of historical importance. In general, he takes into account only the administrative needs of his Department, and leaves to the Inspecting Officers the task of deciding what types of documents should be excluded from the Schedule on historical grounds. The Inspecting Officers designate classes of documents which may be destroyed (and, in some cases, specify certain classes which must be retained). Because they cannot examine each individual document they preface each Destruction Schedule with a clause stating that Departments will have the papers within these classes examined, in order that those likely to be of historical importance may be withdrawn. Thus the major responsibility for exercising the historical criterion is borne by the Departmental Officers who carry out the actual work of review.

58. The amount of documents created in, or which pass into the custody of, Departments each year is enormous. In the Home Office, for example, newly created documents take up over half a mile (2,800 feet) of shelving space each year; in the Ministry of Supply they occupy 12 miles (64,000 feet). Though most of these papers will ultimately be destroyed, under the existing procedure every single one of them (with the exception of those which can be classified as belonging to a whole class of similar papers) must be examined in accordance with the provisions of the Destruction Schedule to see whether it contains anything likely to be of historical or legal importance, or to be useful for social or economic research. This is a gigantic task, and on that account must inevitably be allotted to junior staff.\* Even if there were such a plentiful supply of administrative and executive staff that it would be physically possible to employ them on this work, the cost of doing so would be prohibitive. The effect of the present arrangements is that junior staff are required to take decisions of great complexity, in accordance with a criterion in no way related to the general work they do. If the existing state of affairs is to be remedied it will be necessary to allot the work of deciding what is to be retained to more senior staff, and to reduce the work of the junior staff as far as possible to routine. It will also be necessary to ensure that the actual decisions as to what is to be retained are taken in accordance with a criterion which the staff responsible for making them will find it practicable to apply.

59. We believe that these objects will not be achieved so long as the attempt is made to apply the historical criterion directly to the whole range of a Department's papers. We consider that the solution to the problem must lie in the application of this criterion by indirect means. If the question to be answered by the Department's reviewing officer is put in the form, "Is this paper likely to be of historical or legal importance, or to be useful for social or economic research?" it is difficult to see what the grounds for his answer can be; for he is unlikely to have had any experience to which he could possibly relate such a question. But if the question is put in the form, "Is this Department likely to require this paper any longer for its own Departmental purposes?" it immediately becomes intelligible in terms of the experience gained by a Departmental Officer in the course of his normal work. Such a substitution can of course be justified only if the two forms of the question are in practice synonymous; that is, if the papers retained as a result of answering the question in its second form will in practice include those which would be retained if it were possible to give a correct answer to the question in its first form. Subject to the provisos set out in the next paragraph, we believe that they will.

60. The first proviso is that the question must be answered within a short period of time after the paper has ceased to be in active use. There will clearly be a difference between the answer which a Department would give five years after papers have ceased to be in active use and that which it might give after 50 years. It is better that the period should be too short than too long. The second proviso is that the words "for its own Departmental purposes" must not imply a limitation to the question dealt with specifically in the paper concerned; they must also cover the likelihood of the paper being required as a precedent or as a guide to possible action should a similar set of circumstances arise in the future. This would entail the preservation, *inter alia*, of papers showing the authority under which a Department exercises, or has exercised, any particular function; together

\* The term "junior" in relation to Civil Service staff refers to grade and not to age.

with papers showing the organisation it has developed, the policies it has adopted, and the procedures it has followed, in order to carry out that function. Papers would not be destroyed merely because the activities with which they dealt had ceased to exist; though the rationing of meat, for example, is due to end in 1954, the possibility that it may have to be reintroduced at some time in the future is one that cannot be overlooked, and the main papers on the subject would therefore undoubtedly be preserved. The third proviso is that special arrangements should be made for what in paragraph 62 below we refer to as "particular instance" papers. Subject to these provisos we think that it will in practice be justifiable to devise a procedure on the assumption that if a Department decides that a paper, within a short time of the completion of action on it, is not likely to be required further for the Department's own purposes, that paper is unlikely to be of any material historical significance. In other words, we consider that, within the margin of error inevitable under any system, the papers which a historian of the future may wish to have preserved will in practice automatically be included among those which Departments find it necessary to keep for more than a short period for their own Departmental purposes. The adoption of such a system would ensure that the historical criterion was in effect exercised in relation to the whole of a Department's papers, but indirectly and in a form which Departments would find it practicable to apply.

61. The adoption of this procedure would permit the early destruction of what Departments have variously estimated at between 50 and 90 per cent. of their papers.\* The exercise of the criterion suggested in the previous paragraph should ensure that all papers likely to be of historical importance are retained: it will not necessarily ensure that all papers that are retained are likely to be of historical importance. This is an inevitable consequence of the proviso that the decision must be taken soon after papers have passed out of active use. We therefore recommend that, except in those cases where experience shows that it would be uneconomical to do so, the papers that are retained should be subject to a further review when they have reached a certain age. Because of the circumstances under which this review would take place we think it should be possible for the historical criterion to be exercised directly in relation to the papers considered at it. We shall discuss this more fully in paragraph 87 below. For convenience we shall refer to these two reviews as the "First" and the "Second" Review. We recommend that the First Review should take place not later than five years after a paper or file has passed out of active use, and the Second Review when the paper or file is 25 years old.

62. The "particular instance" or "case" papers to which we have referred in paragraph 60 above consist of what are often very large groups of papers, the subject matter of which is the same, though each relating to a different person, body, or place. While each individual document may be of little importance by itself, taken together or by way of sample these papers enable certain broad conclusions as to historical, economic, or social trends to be drawn. Fortunately the identification of these papers should present no serious difficulties, and we recommend that they should receive special treatment. The type of papers we have in mind and the arrangements we

\* It may prove desirable, in relation to one or two Departments where the percentage of papers which could be destroyed at the First Review might be small, either to omit the First Review altogether, or otherwise to modify the application of our proposals; but we consider that this should be done only with the concurrence of the Public Record Department.

suggest should be made in respect of them are described in paragraphs 88 to 110 below.

63. Under the procedure which we have proposed some material will undoubtedly be destroyed which the historian of the future would wish to have had preserved. But we consider that the amount of significant material that may be lost in this way is likely to be less than under any other system which it would be practicable to adopt. The general effect of our proposals should be both to improve the quality of the material preserved and to ensure that the Public Record Office receives it in regular and orderly fashion. Their adoption should, as we shall later show, make possible a more or less even flow of records from all Departments to the Public Record Office, and more or less uniform rules for opening them to the public. For the historian this will mean, not only that the right material is more likely to be preserved, but that it will become available in the Public Record Office for him to see.

#### **Responsibility of Departments**

64. It is axiomatic that the decision as to which papers a Department should retain further "for its own Departmental purposes" is one that can be taken only by the Department itself. The procedure which we have outlined in the previous paragraphs would thus involve a departure from the present system of scheduling papers for destruction under the terms of the Public Record Office Act, 1877. In form the change would be a substantial one; in practice the shift in responsibility would be slight for, as we have pointed out in paragraph 57 above, the major responsibility for deciding what is to be retained is already borne by the Departments themselves. In this Section of the Report we shall discuss the arrangements to be made by Departments for carrying out the new procedure, and we shall leave until the following Section a description of the part to be played by the Public Record Department. We believe that the effect of our proposals should be to ensure that the respective responsibilities of the Public Record Department and the other Departments are exercised much more effectively than they can be at present; and that, so far from being weakened, the ability of the Public Record Department to influence the selection of Departmental records for permanent preservation will be greatly increased.

65. In view of the authority which we recommend should be given to Departments to destroy their own records at the First Review we consider it desirable that the responsibility for the exercise of this authority, and for the efficient conduct of the Department's reviewing arrangements generally, should be vested in a senior officer of the Department. We have been impressed, in those Departments whose reviewing arrangements we have examined, by the extent to which efficiency of operation has coincided with adequacy of supervision. When the reviewing arrangements have been bad, or have been ineffectively applied, we have found that the senior officers nominally responsible for oversight of the work have had little idea of what was being done. Statements made by these officers as to the quality of the staff employed, the times at which the reviewing work was done, and the general procedure in use, have been contradicted by what we have been told by the persons actually doing the work or have learned from our own observations. This ignorance on the part of the controlling officers about the work done by their staffs is not a phenomenon which is peculiar to the handling of records: it is a symptom of bad management, and its remedy is a matter of management technique. Its importance in relation to the preservation of Departmental records lies in the fact that the efficient working of the reviewing procedure is not a

matter which will make itself apparent in the ordinary course of Departmental business. It can only be revealed by active observation and the making of test checks. We therefore recommend that the responsibility for a Department's arrangements for the preservation of its records should, under the head of the Department, be vested in the Director of Establishments or an officer of equivalent status. We shall describe below the more particular arrangements which we consider should be made by Departments for the preservation of their records; it would be the responsibility of the senior officer concerned to satisfy himself from time to time, by enquiry and by sample check, that these arrangements were being properly operated.

66. To devise a satisfactory method of conducting the First and Second Reviews is largely an administrative problem. Departmental records are papers created in the course of Government administration, and the arrangements made by a Department for handling its papers while they are in current use are a part of the administrative process. The selection of documents for preservation is a subordinate, but integral, part of this same process. The way in which current papers are handled also affects their usefulness as archives; and, conversely, the arrangements to be made for reviewing papers must have regard to the way in which they have been handled while in current use. We consider it desirable, therefore, that the immediate responsibility for the handling of a Department's papers and for the conduct of the new reviewing procedure should be concentrated in the same hands.

67. We therefore recommend that each Department should appoint an officer—whom we shall call the "Departmental Record Officer"—to be responsible under the Director of Establishments for the care of its papers from the time when they are created or first received in the Department, until they are disposed of, either by destruction or by transfer to the Public Record Office. On this officer would rest the responsibility for deciding, in consultation with the administrative staff, which papers it was necessary for the Department to retain further "for its own Departmental purposes" at the First Review. The duties which we propose for the Departmental Record Officer are akin to those at present performed in a few Departments by the Chief Registrar. But it is important that the Departmental Record Officer should control—or at least know the whereabouts of—all papers in the Department, and not merely those which are registered. We deal with this point more fully in the succeeding paragraphs. Because circumstances differ so much between Departments we make no specific recommendations as to what place the Departmental Record Officer should occupy in the Departmental structure. His status would need to be higher than that at present given by some Departments to their Chief Registrar, and we would urge on all Departments the importance of appointing a capable official to this post. It is the keystone of all our proposals in this section of the Report.

#### **Material for Selection**

68. Having stated the method which we consider should be adopted for the reviewing of Departmental records, we shall now examine the way in which effect can be given to it in relation to the various types of papers to be found in Departments. The detailed application of the procedure to the whole of a Department's papers would be the responsibility of the Departmental Record Officer.

69. A Department's papers may be divided into those which are registered and those which are unregistered. The main features of registration are

the classifying, numbering, and indexing of papers, in order to enable them to be identified and traced when required. Unregistered papers should consist, in the main, of those which are considered to be of insufficient importance to merit registration, and documents, for example of a standard type, which do not need to be registered to enable them to be identified and traced. In addition there are a few categories of unregistered papers for which special arrangements are made; we refer to these in paragraph 71 below.

70. As we have explained in paragraph 34 above. Departments keep their registered papers in files, each of which usually contains the papers dealing with a particular piece of business. These files, which are numerous (the War Office, for example, opens some 80,000 new files each year), are kept in the Departmental registries, of which there may be a number in any one Department. In the registry, papers are filed, and the files classified, numbered, and indexed in accordance with the particular registration system in use. Incoming correspondence is usually delivered to the registry, where it is attached to the relevant files (or new files are opened) and sent to the appropriate officer or office for action. The registry may also undertake a variety of other duties arising out of these functions—for example, the recording of precedents. It is in the registries too that most Departments review their papers, and strip those files which it is decided to transfer to the Public Record Office.

71. In addition to a Department's main registered and unregistered papers there are some types of papers, such as those containing correspondence to and from the Minister's Private Office, for which special arrangements are made. Some of these papers are registered and some unregistered. There are thus three categories of Departmental papers which we shall need to consider—unregistered papers, papers for which special arrangements are made, and papers which come within the scope of the Department's general registration procedure.

#### *(a) Unregistered Papers*

72. The application in relation to a Department's unregistered papers of the method of reviewing we have outlined in paragraph 60 above should raise few problems. By their very nature most of these papers would fail to qualify for retention at the First Review. Unregistered documents of a standard type present no difficulties of identification, and at the First Review most of them would either be destroyed or receive the special treatment which we shall later suggest should be applied to "particular instance" papers. For example, a substantial proportion of the papers of this type consists of accounting documents. These are of considerable bulk. But whatever value they may have had in the past, few of them are of historical importance today. They are easily identifiable and can be automatically destroyed whenever a Department has no reason to apprehend further claims arising from them. We suggest that the Departmental Record Officer should draw up a list of these various types of papers, specifying what action is to be taken on each of them at the First Review.

73. More important among unregistered papers are the "branch folders" which in some Departments with centralised registration systems are used by administrative officers to keep papers which they consider to be of insufficient

\* The term is not used universally in this sense. In some Departments, for example, papers are referred to as being kept in "branch" or "personal" folders which we should include within our category of papers for which special arrangements are made.

importance to justify their being registered. It is no doubt impossible (and contrary to the purpose of their creation) to exercise a central control over these branch folders beyond stipulating that they should not be used to contain papers that would need to be retained on administrative grounds for more than whatever is the specified period. Where branch folders are used for important papers this probably arises from a lack of confidence between the administrative and registry staffs, and the best way to remedy the abuse would be to remove its cause. A variant of the branch folder system is the use of unregistered folders for housing papers such as Minutes of Departmental Committees, copies of telegrams, and Departmental circulars. Probably the most satisfactory method of keeping track of these papers so as to ensure that they did not escape the process of review would be to include them within the Department's registration system.

(b) "*Special Category*" Papers

74. The most important of a Department's papers for which separate arrangements are normally made are those kept in the offices of the Minister and the Permanent Secretary. The papers leading up to the enactment of important legislation, though often unregistered, are usually bound together and kept separately from the Department's registered papers. That these papers have been bound is evidence enough that they are expected to be of more than temporary administrative usefulness, and they would automatically qualify for retention at the First Review. The arrangements for handling Parliamentary and Ministerial papers differ between Departments. In most Departments it is customary to have special registration arrangements (and often separate registries) for papers relating to Parliamentary questions and for correspondence between Ministers and Members of Parliament. Special arrangements are also usually made for secret and similar papers. It is general, but not universal, practice for Ministers' letters and minutes dealing with general policy matters to be enclosed within files which are registered under normal Departmental registration arrangements. We would not wish to prescribe any universal procedure for dealing with these various types of papers, but would point out that they should not be overlooked when a Department compiles its detailed reviewing procedure. Probably the most satisfactory method of dealing with any of the papers that are registered would be to bring them within the scope of the arrangements to be made for the reviewing of the Department's registered papers generally.

75. The papers in a Minister's office may include a certain amount of his private correspondence—for example copies of letters to and from his constituents. We are informed that until the early years of the twentieth century a Minister's correspondence, even on official subjects, was regarded as his private property, and could be removed by him on leaving office. To the best of our knowledge this principle is not followed today so far as official papers are concerned. We would stress that the dividing line between official and private correspondence—at no time an easy one to draw—should be fixed on the basis that papers concerning which there is any doubt should be treated as official. We recommend that Private Secretaries should work in close contact with the Departmental Record Officers over the arrangements to be made for the handling of their Minister's papers.

76. A category of documents for which special registration arrangements are normally made consists of files relating to members of the staff. At present there is no standard retention period for these. In one Department the Schedule authorises their destruction two years after cessation of employment in the case of unestablished officers, and seven years in the case of

established officers. In another Department, whether they relate to established or unestablished staff, they may not be destroyed until 65 years after the birth of the officer concerned, or twelve years after his employment ceases, whichever is the later. The considerations governing the length of time over which it is necessary for these papers to be retained are purely administrative (relating, in the main, to questions of pension) and we recommend that the Public Record Department, in consultation with the Treasury and the other Departments, should draw up standardised retention periods for them.

(c) *Registered Papers*

77. For registered papers we consider that the unit for purposes of review should be, not the individual paper, but the individual file.\* We deal further with this point in paragraph 83 below.

*First Review*

78. The reviewing procedure adopted in a Department for its registered papers should be based on the way in which it handles those papers while they are in current use; in other words it should be an extension of, rather than a superimposition on, its registration system. There is, however, no standard system of registration in use in Government Departments. Since the primary purpose of a registry is to give efficient and prompt service to those who use its files in their daily work, Departments have adopted arrangements which they consider to be best suited to their own needs. This has resulted in considerable diversity, not so much in the range of work undertaken by registries, as in their organisation, and in the methods of classifying, filing, numbering, and indexing papers. The variety of registration systems in use means that it would be impossible (even if it were desirable) to lay down in anything but the broadest terms a reviewing procedure capable of universal application. The responsibility for devising a satisfactory method of conducting the First Review will rest on Departments themselves. Needless to say we have satisfied ourselves that what we have suggested is workable and indeed that in some Departments little if any modification will be necessary in existing registration arrangements in order to adopt it. In the following paragraphs we refer briefly to some of the considerations which Departments will need to take into account.

79. If the registration system in use in a Department is to be the foundation on which the reviewing procedure is to be built, it is essential that it should be well and truly laid. We would repeat that the main consideration to be taken into account in organising registry work is the need to facilitate the conduct of the Department's current business. But the way in which current papers are handled has its effect on their quality as archives. We have referred to the practice among many Departments of allotting the work of registering their current papers to the less able among their staff. We confess that we are surprised at the prevalence of what appears to us to be a most short-sighted policy. If registries were given their fair share of average quality staff, if their standing in general esteem were raised, and if the promotion prospects of registry staff were no lower than those of similar grade staff employed elsewhere, we feel sure that the current work of Departments would be facilitated. The physical condition of papers sent to the Public Record Office would also be improved, and, what is

\* For the distinction between a "paper" and a "file" see paragraph 70 above. We assume the continuance of the present practice of "stripping" (see paragraph 41 above) those files which it has been decided to retain permanently prior to their transfer to the Public Record Office. The decision as to whether this is a worthwhile operation we should prefer to leave for the Public Record Department to take after it has had some experience of the new procedure in operation. The question is not entirely one of economics.

important for our present purpose, the process of selecting them made easier. It would be lacking in a sense of proportion for us to recommend that Departments should look to their registration work in order to improve the quality of the records they send to the Public Record Office. But we record it as our belief that if Departments paid more attention to the work of their registries they would gain advantages for themselves that would have as a by-product the production of better quality records for the Public Record Office.

80. We have proposed that files should be reviewed for the first time at a fixed period, not exceeding five years, after they have ceased to be in active use. The period would not need to be the same for all Departments, nor indeed for all branches within a Department. Some Departments now destroy after only one or two years large categories of registered papers which are of no further administrative importance and which can easily be identified. We should certainly not wish to see the destruction of such papers postponed unnecessarily. If, on the other hand, a Department had a large block of files which could easily be identified and which it was essential for it to retain, for example on legal grounds, for a period greater than five years after they had passed out of active use, there would be no harm in its setting them aside, at the First Review, for destruction without further examination at the end of the longer period. But the number of categories to be treated in this way, and the number of different retention periods involved, would have to be severely restricted, otherwise many of the complexities inherent in the present arrangements would be retained.

81. The process of identifying those files which have been out of active use for the requisite period should present no difficulties. The particular arrangements to be made will depend on the registration system in use in a Department. It is usual, under most registration systems, for a file's movements, together with the relevant dates, to be recorded on its cover and on the numerical index slip or its equivalent.\* The identification of files for review could thus be by means of a periodical check of the files themselves, or, more simply, of the numerical index slips. Alternatively, as one Department has proposed, files whose active life has for the time being ceased may be placed on the shelves in the date order in which they are "put away" in the registry, and the numerical index slip noted accordingly.

82. In order to ensure that the First Review of files was not artificially delayed it would probably be necessary to stipulate that all files should be closed after a specified period, and any succeeding papers on the same topic enclosed in a new file cover. In general there are two types of files which may have a very long life. There are those which deal with a subject on which it is constantly necessary to have reference to the earlier papers however old they may be; and those where action on a subject is spasmodic or periodic, and where in order to complete the business in hand it is not necessary to refer to what has been done before. It is in order to distinguish between the two types, and to ensure that the latter are not unnecessarily retained, that we propose the closing of files after a fixed period. If the earlier papers were required for consultation they would be marked accordingly, both on the file cover and on the numerical index slip; there would thus be evidence to show that they were still in active use. If they were not consulted they would remain in the registry, and at the end of the specified period would become due for review.

\* A numerical index is an index arranged in order of the numbers borne by files. In a numerical index of the loose leaf type (which type is being increasingly used today) the number and particulars of each file are recorded on a separate sheet of paper, which is called the "numerical index slip".

83. If the unit for purposes of the First Review is to be the individual file it is essential that the file's title should accurately reflect its contents. Some Departments have said that under present arrangements, even though the need to exercise the historical criterion were removed, they would still find it necessary to require reviewing clerks to examine every individual paper so as to ensure that important papers had not been placed on files which from the outside appeared to contain only matters of minor importance. It is not uncommon for the business conducted on a file to change or develop beyond the scope of the title originally allotted to it. But we consider that the appropriate time for files to be scrutinised from this point of view is when they are received back in the registry to be "put away" on passing out of use. To plead the necessity to scrutinise papers within files at the reviewing stage is to admit that for the duration of the period that has elapsed since a file was "put away" the registry indexes have failed in their purpose of enabling papers to be speedily identified and traced. A registration system which ensures that a file's contents are adequately described by its title and that files are not used to house papers on subjects other than those for which they were originally created, is both more efficient and more economical than one which requires reviewing staff to look through each file, to ensure that the papers on it have not gone outside the subject matter recorded in its title.

84. We have recommended in paragraph 67 above that it should be the Departmental Record Officer who should decide which files are to be retained at the First Review. We recommend that in so far as it is possible for him to classify files he should do so, but only if the papers within any one class are of a standard type whose general content will not vary from year to year. The classification of files for this purpose should coincide with the classification used for registering the files when they are in current use. The list of file classes constructed in this way should specify the manner in which each class is to be disposed of at the First Review. The residue of files which cannot be classified should be reviewed individually, either by files, or, where appropriate, by series of files. In this way the decision as to what is to be retained would relate to actual files, or series of files, and not to artificially constructed classes of papers compiled, may be, in advance of the creation of the type of papers to which they are supposed to refer, and which need interpretation in relation to each individual paper. It will be remembered that classifications of this sort are a feature of the present Destruction Schedules and that the classifications used in the Schedules often bear no necessary relation to the classifications used in registering files for current purposes.

85. It is our object that the work of the junior staff at the First Review should be automatic, amounting to no more than extracting from the shelves those files which have been designated for destruction. The way in which the Departmental Record Officer would indicate to his staff which files not on the classified list were to be retained and which destroyed might vary from one Department to another. One suggestion that has been made to us is that the Departmental Record Officer might indicate those files which could be destroyed by marking the relevant slips in the registry's numerical index. But it is not for us to prescribe what particular system a Department should adopt. It may be thought that in the larger Departments the requirement that decisions should relate to actual files or series of files would prove especially onerous. But if the registration systems in use in Departments are designed to take the obligations of the reviewing procedure into account, we believe that the work will be less burdensome than might otherwise appear. It will, in any case be far more manageable than that involved

under the present arrangements whereby junior staff are required to exercise judgment over the whole of a Department's papers.

86. The procedure we have outlined is one whose efficiency can readily be tested. If at the First Review too much is being retained this can be discovered by means of periodical test checks of the files set aside for retention. If too much is being destroyed this will become apparent, both in the course of test checks, and also should files which are wanted for administrative purposes be found to be not available. We consider that test checks should constitute an essential part of a Department's reviewing arrangements.

#### *Second Review*

87. Files for consideration at the Second Review will, of course, consist of those which have escaped destruction at the First.\* In other words, at the second stage there will come up for review all the surviving files in the Department which have been created twenty-five years (or whatever is the specified period) previously. We recommend that the decision as to what is to be retained at the Second Review should be taken by the Departmental Record Officer in conjunction with a representative of the Public Record Department. We believe that because of their greatly reduced bulk, the perspective that should have been brought about by time, and the participation in this Second Review of the Public Record Department, it should be possible for the historical criterion to be exercised directly in relation to these papers. Thus the criteria for preservation at the Second Review will be both administrative and historical, and files will be either destroyed, retained in the Department for a further period on administrative grounds, or stripped and transferred to the Public Record Office.

#### **"Particular Instance" Papers**

88. In paragraph 62 we proposed that special arrangements should be made for what we called "particular instance" papers. These papers are normally either unregistered, or registered differently from a Department's "subject" or "policy" files. In the next paragraphs we give examples of some of them, stating the kind of information which they contain, the amount of space they occupy, and present practice concerning them. "Particular instance" papers include a wide variety of documents such as applications for sickness benefit, income tax returns, applications for licences, and routine correspondence between the central Government and local authorities. For purposes of example, however, we shall confine ourselves to those which give information about persons and those which give information about business concerns.

##### *(a) Information about Persons*

89. Records which give information about persons are astonishingly numerous and diverse. An individual may be documented in a number of different ways, some of which we describe below.

##### *(i) General Register Office Records*

90. The most important of the forms giving information about individuals are those relating to the registration of births, marriages, and deaths, which has been compulsory in England and Wales since 1836. These records are kept by the General Register Office, and their permanent retention is required by statute. The General Register Office is also responsible for

\* There may also be a number of files which have not been continuously out of active use for sufficiently long a period to qualify for a First Review.

the conduct of the ten-yearly Censuses. The ancillary records of each Census (summary books of statistics, tabulation result sheets, etc.) are destroyed after use in accordance with the authority given in the General Register Office's Destruction Schedule. By far the greatest bulk of the records amassed at any Census consists of the schedules completed in relation to each single household. These schedules have been retained. Those relating to Censuses from 1831 to 1851 are deposited in the Public Record Office; those relating to later Censuses (except those of the 1931 census which were destroyed by fire during the late war) are in the custody of the General Register Office. The schedules relating to the Censuses of 1861 to 1921 occupy some 14,000 feet of racking. The 1951 Schedules, which contain more information and are therefore larger, occupy some 7,500 feet of racking.

#### (ii) *Service Records*

91. It is the present practice of the three Service Departments to earmark for permanent preservation a personal record in respect of each individual who has served with the Forces. Each ship, or naval service station, maintains a Ship's Ledger in which are recorded the personal particulars of each member of the crew or station. Details entered include particulars concerning pay, income tax, periods of sick leave, and postings to and from other ships. At the end of each quarter the Ledger is transferred to the Admiralty and a new Ledger opened. The Ledgers are ultimately bound, it being usual for each volume to be devoted to the Ship's Ledgers of one particular ship over a period of 12 months. These volumes are accruing at the peacetime rate of 80 feet a year. Until 1929, there was maintained, in addition to the Ship's Ledger, a Central Register in which one page was devoted to each individual serviceman. The particulars recorded included his physical characteristics, the ships in which he served, his rank, badges, and conduct classification. These Central Register sheets accrued at the peacetime rate of four feet a year. They have now been replaced by a card register which reduces the amount of accommodation required.

92. The War Office retains in respect of each individual serviceman his Attestation Form (or its equivalent) and Medical History Sheet. The particulars of service shown on the Attestation Form are similar to those recorded in the Admiralty Central Register. The War Office estimates that there are some 36,000 feet of these documents already in existence, and that they are accruing at the peacetime rate of 400 feet a year.

93. The Air Ministry is retaining for permanent preservation a ledger sheet in respect of officers, and a personal record card in respect of airmen. The service particulars given in the record card are similar to those on the Admiralty Central Register, though in rather more detail. The Air Ministry estimates that it already has some 4,000 feet of these records, and that they are accruing at the peacetime rate of 100 feet a year.

94. During the 12 months ending on 30th September, 1952, the War Office received some 29,000 enquiries necessitating access to the personal records in its possession. In the experience of the War Office, interest in the personal records of an individual ceases a few years after his death. The Admiralty and the War Office suggest that a suitable time for personal records to be kept on administrative grounds would be 60 years from their creation. The Air Ministry states that it has not been in existence long enough to make a forecast on this point, but adds that the period of retention suitable for its own purposes would probably be the same as that decided on by the Admiralty and the War Office.

95. In addition to those records in the hands of the Service ministries there are a large number of similar records in the possession of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance. This Ministry maintains a separate "Awards" file for each pensioner. In the case of servicemen this contains his service records, together with the Ministry's case sheets. Five years after the pensioner's death correspondence is stripped from these files leaving the Ministry's award sheets, medical documents, and the whole of his service records. The medical documents may be numerous, and the file at this stage remains bulky. It is the present intention to hand these files over to the Public Record Office 50 years after the end of the war to which they relate. About 120,000 feet of files relating to the First World War, of which 72,000 feet are medical records, will thus be due for transfer to the Public Record Office in about 15 years time. The corresponding total figure for the Second World War is about 40,000 feet. The medical documents relating to pensioners of both World Wars are at present being examined and compared by doctors on the staff of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance. It is expected that this examination will be completed before the time comes for the files to be handed over to the Public Record Office.

96. In addition to the personal records of individual servicemen there are also in existence the personal records of individuals in certain civilian organisations. Thus the index cards and service sheet of every person who has served in the Women's Land Army are under present arrangements due to be preserved.

(iii) *Ships' Crews (Merchant Navy)*

97. Masters of foreign-going ships are required by law to maintain an Official Log Book and to enter into an Agreement with every seaman carried as crew. The Log Book and a copy of the Agreement are eventually passed to the Registry of Shipping and Seamen at Cardiff. These records account for some three-quarters of the 40,000 feet of records held by the Registry, and they are accruing at the rate of about 700 feet a year. During the Second World War the Ministry of War Transport applied to the Public Record Department for authority to destroy Logs and Agreements not required for administrative purposes, but after taking outside advice the Public Record Department declined to agree to their inclusion in a Destruction Schedule.

(iv) *National Insurance Records*

98. A personal record of more recent innovation is the Record Sheet maintained in respect of every person insured under the National Insurance Acts. This record sheet includes particulars of the name, sex, date of birth, marital status, date of entry into insurance, and the number of contributions paid or credited. These sheets are filed according to their numbers by the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, and information is extracted periodically for actuarial purposes from a 3 per cent. sample of them. They are accruing at the rate of 200 feet a year and the nominal index to them at the rate of 70 feet a year. The Ministry intends to retain them, for administrative purposes, for a hundred years after the birth of each individual. Whether they should then be destroyed has been considered by the Public Record Department, but as none of them would in any case become due for destruction for a number of years, no decision concerning them has yet been taken.

(v) *Passenger Manifests*

99. The master of every ship arriving from, or bound for, places out of Europe and not within the Mediterranean Sea, is required by law to furnish to the Minister of Transport and to the Board of Customs and Excise a return in prescribed form of all passengers on board. The information to be shown on the Manifests includes the age, occupation, and address in the United Kingdom of each passenger, the class in which he travelled, and the date of his entering or leaving the United Kingdom. The Manifests supplied to the Board of Customs and Excise are passed to the Immigration Branch of the Home Office and eventually destroyed. The copies furnished to the port officer of the Ministry of Transport are sent to the Board of Trade, which uses them to prepare statistics of passenger movements, migration, and tourism, which are subsequently published in the Board of Trade Journal. These Manifests are not destroyed and those relating to years before 1951 are now housed at the Public Record Office. During the year ending 31st March 1952, 127 enquiries were received by the Board of Trade or the Public Record Department concerning information contained in the Manifests. Enquiries are received from private persons, solicitors, and Government Departments (United Kingdom, Commonwealth, and foreign) who wish to obtain information about individuals who are known to have left or entered this country by sea at some time in the past. In some cases enquiries relate to relatives who emigrated several years ago; in others they are made to discover the age of a voyager and so substantiate a claim to a pension under either British or foreign national insurance schemes. The Manifests in the Public Record Office occupy over 1,100 feet of shelving, and they are accruing at the rate of 18 feet a year.

100. The law and practice relating to passengers travelling by air are quite different. The Passenger Manifest which a pilot is required to furnish to the Immigration and Customs Officers need contain only the surnames and initials of aliens (though in fact it contains the names of all passengers), the points of embarkation and disembarkation, and the date. Copies supplied to Immigration Officers are destroyed after one year, and those supplied to Customs Officers after three years in respect of outgoing and six years in respect of incoming passengers. The Manifests are regarded as confidential documents and information on them is not divulged to members of the public. To preserve one copy of each Manifest would require about 80 feet of racking a year.

(b) *Information about Business Concerns*

101. Papers giving information about business concerns (including individuals where they run a business) may be in either standard or non-standard form. An example of the former is provided by the records of companies held in the Companies Registration Office of the Board of Trade, to which we have referred in paragraph 53 above. Other routine returns include those made by firms to the Board of Trade in the course of Censuses of Production and Distribution, and those made to the Ministry of Labour and National Service about the numbers and earnings of workers. The former are destroyed after a number of years; concerning the latter no decision has yet been taken. An example of returns made for a particular occasion are those submitted under the Sea Fish Industry Act, 1938. This Act established a White Fish Commission which was required to maintain a register of persons carrying on business in connection with the production, treatment, or sale of white fish. Applications for registration were submitted to the Commission by 66,000 fishmongers, friers, curers, etc., though with the advent of the

war the Commission was suspended, and it has not been reconstituted since. The application forms, occupying 30 feet, and the index to them, occupying 18 feet, were excepted from the Commission's Destruction Schedule and have not been destroyed.

102. Information of a standard type, though not in a standard form, may be given in the files of correspondence with individual firms. Thus our attention has been drawn to the files relating to individual firms concerned in the concentration and deconcentration of industries during and after the war, and files relating to the capital investment programmes of individual firms. Under present arrangements both these sets of papers are due to be destroyed.

#### *Problems of Selection*

103. It may be that some, or all, of these papers, and others like them, contain information which will be of interest to future historians. But their bulk is enormous, and as it will be quite impossible to retain the whole, some method of selection will be required. At present there has been no attempt to view these categories of papers as a whole, and to decide how space can be used to the best advantage. If such an attempt is to be made two main considerations must be taken into account: whether the information contained in any group of papers is obtainable elsewhere, and whether its disclosure is prohibited.

104. Much of the information collected by Government Departments is published, though not in a form which would enable information to be identified concerning particular persons or firms. Many Departments publish annual reports, and some of these—the reports of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Board of Customs and Excise are notable examples—contain information in a form likely to be of assistance to research workers. We note the work that is being done by the Interdepartmental Committee on Social and Economic Research and by the Library Association in bringing these sources of information to the notice of research students.

105. More difficult to assess is the extent to which the returns submitted to Government Departments are duplicated in the records held by the firms themselves. But in any case, we do not think that the Government should be expected to preserve papers giving information about individual concerns merely in order to provide the historian with specific information about any one of them.

106. The disclosure of much material concerning individual concerns is at present prohibited by statute. Much of the statistical information collected today by Departments such as the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Labour and National Service is obtained under the authority of the Statistics of Trade Act, 1947. This, like the earlier Census of Production Acts, 1908 to 1930, places severe restrictions on the disclosure, even within Government Departments, of information relating to individual concerns. Much importance is attached, not only by firms but by the Government Departments requesting the information, to the fact that information is given in confidence and that that confidence will be respected. Any proposal that returns from individual firms should be opened to public inspection in the Public Record Office would involve the amendment of the Statistics of Trade Act.

107. It might be argued that the same canons of secrecy should apply to correspondence between Government Departments and individual firms even where there is no statutory embargo on publication. The argument would

be that, if it were desirable that information supplied in accordance with an enactment such as the Statistics of Trade Act should not be published, it would be illogical to allow the public to have access to what may be equally confidential information merely because it is produced in letter form. Against this it may be argued that the objections to the publication of information, even of the type at present prohibited by statute, would disappear if it were made clear that no one would be given access to any papers which were less than fifty years old.

108. These are problems to which we do not propose ourselves to offer solutions. We consider that these categories of papers should be the subject of special inquiry, and that we are not the body best fitted to conduct it. We therefore content ourselves with suggesting as a general principle that, because of the frightening considerations of bulk, and with the exception of records in the General Register Office relating to the registration of births, marriages, and deaths, only those papers should be kept which are capable of being reduced to a statistical sample. This means that no attempt should be made to keep in the Public Record Office records which would not otherwise be preserved, solely because they contain information which might be useful for genealogical or biographical purposes. The Society of Genealogists has informed us that it considers it would be unreasonable to ask for the retention of service records on genealogical grounds. The genealogist would find useful those service records which record dates of birth and parentage prior to the introduction of the compulsory registration of births in 1836, and also records of a later date relating to men in Scottish and Irish regiments. But, in general, the Society has told us, genealogists make little use of records in the Public Record Office, their main sources of information being the records in the General Register Office.

109. We therefore recommend that a census be taken of all papers of the "particular instance" type in the hands of Government Departments, and that a decision should then be taken as to which should be preserved and in what quantity. We consider that the body best qualified to conduct such an inquiry would be a Committee under the auspices of the Public Record Department, on the lines indicated in paragraph 162 below. The functions of the Committee would be:—

- (a) to conduct a census to find out what papers of this type are in the hands of Departments ;
- (b) to determine what papers, if retained, would give the greatest amount of information in the smallest amount of space ;
- (c) to consider whether any change is desirable in the present practice concerning the confidentiality of these papers ; and consequently
- (d) to decide which papers, and in what quantities, should be preserved.

The Committee would no doubt also be able to recommend the standardisation of practice in relation to certain types of documents (e.g. Passenger Manifests).

110. Whenever any new form of "particular instance" papers is created we recommend that Departments should seek the advice of the Public Record Department (see paragraph 134) as to whether or not any of them should be preserved. The classified list, drawn up for use at the First Review, should assist both the Department and the Public Record Department to keep a proper check on the treatment given to "particular instance" papers.

### Form of Departmental Records

111. The adoption of the proposals which we have outlined in this Section of the Report would ensure that all Departmental records were properly and adequately reviewed. An important factor in our proposals is that the arrangements to be made for the reviewing of Departmental papers would not affect their character as archives; the Departmental records to be preserved in the Public Record Office would consist entirely of papers that accrued in the course of normal administration and not any that were created, or whose form had been modified, for the historian's special benefit. It is for this reason that we must reject two suggestions that have been made to us which, though appearing to improve the quality of the records preserved, would in fact affect their archival character, and tend to lessen their "unselfconsciousness", or "impartiality", which is so important a feature of archives from the historian's point of view.

112. Much Government business is today transacted in conversation, either direct or on the telephone, with the result that, in the words of the American Historical Association, "evidence that used to be recorded on paper is increasingly being written on air"<sup>38</sup>. It is in order to complete the evidence that is available to the historian that the suggestion has been made that a written record should be made of telephone and other conversations. The advantages of such a proposal to the historian are obvious; it is, however, open to a number of objections. In the first place it would create extra work for the administrator that would do little to further the dispatch of the business on which he was engaged. This is not only undesirable in itself but would also mean that, for this very reason, the rule would as often as not be ignored. To require an administrator to record telephone conversations in the interests of posterity would also be dangerous in that it would add to the self-consciousness with which he approached his work. The practice of framing documents with an eye to "the record" is already not unknown, and we should not wish to add to the number of these by having it constantly brought home to the administrator that what he wrote might be scanned by the historian as well as by the person for whose immediate benefit he was writing. But the main objection to a requirement that telephone and other conversations should be recorded, irrespective of whether this was necessary on administrative grounds, is that documents of this sort would not be "records" in the sense in which we have defined the term in paragraph 1 of this Report, because they would have been drawn up for purposes other than the conduct of the affairs of which they formed a part. Our rejection of this suggestion means that whenever decisions are taken in the course of conversation and subsequently not committed to writing, or where a decision is recorded but the reasons for it left unstated, the historian will be the loser. This cannot be avoided. It must, however, be remembered that even if every conversation were committed to writing the motives that lay behind any particular action might still be unrevealed. Many of the documents produced in the course of administration are not objective assessments of the issues involved but *ex parte* statements designed to convince a particular officer, Minister, or the Cabinet itself. From these it may be possible to deduce motives, but the historian can never hope for his material to be documented in every detail.

113. We must also reject, and on similar grounds, the suggestion that there should be someone in every important office who would determine the quality of paper and ink to be used to record any particular transaction, so as to ensure that important business was recorded on good quality paper and

cheaper paper used for matters of ephemeral importance.\* That the quality of a good deal of the paper used today leaves much to be desired from the point of view of its permanence cannot be denied ; but apart from the dangers of self-consciousness to which any such control over the uses of paper would be subject, we consider the suggestion impracticable under present conditions because the quality of paper used in Government Departments today must be determined largely by factors such as the availability of raw materials, the costs of paper, and the balance of external payments. Within these limits we think it would be useful if Her Majesty's Stationery Office could consult with the Public Record Department so that archival interests were represented when decisions concerning the quality of paper were taken. Apart from this, we regard it as unavoidable, though a matter for regret, that the Public Record Office should have to accept records on whatever quality of paper is offered to it. It must be the responsibility of the archivists in the Public Record Office to keep the records in their charge under review, and to determine what action, if any, is required in the case of documents which are becoming mutilated or faded. We look to the proposals which we have made for a two-stage reviewing procedure, coupled with a proposal which we shall make later for an examination of records in the Public Record Office itself, to reduce the amount of unimportant material for which such attention will be necessary.

## 2. SUPERVISION—THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC RECORD DEPARTMENT

114. In paragraphs 46 to 54 above we have described the effects that have followed from the agreement of 1845-6 between the Master of the Rolls and the Treasury. Under this agreement the Public Record Department acts as an agency or extension of Departments, with whom rests the responsibility for ensuring that their records are properly maintained and preserved. The obligation placed on Departments to have regard to the possible needs of future research workers is, we have said, an onerous one, in meeting which they gain little advantage for themselves. A result of the present arrangements is that the work of reviewing documents and transferring to the Public Record Office those which are due to be preserved has fallen into arrear. We are convinced of the need for some form of central oversight of the activities of Departments in this field. The nature of this oversight is a matter that needs careful consideration, raising, as it does, questions which relate to constitutional practice and the principles of Government administration generally.

### "Charge and Superintendence"

115. Under the Public Record Office Act, 1838, the Master of the Rolls has "full power to make such Orders as he may think fit for cleaning, repairing, preserving, and arranging all the Public Records under his Charge and Superintendence, and for making Calendars, Catalogues, and Indexes to the same, and for such purposes to cause any of the said Records to be from time to time removed from their present Place of Custody, and deposited in such safe Place or Places as the Master of the Rolls may order by Warrant under his Hand, directed to the Person then having the same under his Care". Thus the Master of the Rolls has power to issue detailed instructions to Departments as to the procedure to be used for registering their papers, the arrangements to be made for storing them, and the places in which they are to be kept. In the words of the Royal Commission of 1910, "he can at any moment assume custody of all or any of them by issuing warrants

\* An Interdepartmental Committee considered this problem in 1932, but no action was taken as a result of its deliberations.

under his hand as provided by the Act ; and this . . . without any requirement of approval by the heads of Departments, or even any provision for consulting them. In other words, it is possible, as a matter of strict law, for the Master of the Rolls, by a stroke of the pen, to dislocate the whole executive machinery of the State<sup>33</sup>.

116. These powers have never been exercised. It has, nevertheless, been suggested to us that though the Act is impracticable in its present form the principle of "charge and superintendence" might with advantage be more fully applied than at present so as to give either the head of the Public Record Department, or some other authority, executive powers to control the way in which Departments handle their records. Though the powers given by the 1838 Act are too wide, the principle, it has been suggested, is sound.

117. In considering this suggestion it is important to remember the purpose which the powers of "charge and superintendence" were intended to serve. At the time of the passing of the 1838 Act the Country's legal records were scattered in a number of different repositories under variously appointed keepers. It was recognised that it would not be possible for some time to gather these records together into a single repository. In the event, it was not until thirty years after the passing of the Act that the last of these records were brought into the "custody" of the Master of the Rolls. It was in order to ensure that their condition did not deteriorate meanwhile that these records were placed under the "charge and superintendence" of the Master of the Rolls, and he was given the powers described in paragraph 115 above for ensuring their proper treatment.

118. The Order in Council of 1852 had the effect of bringing Departmental records within the scope of these provisions. But the circumstances relating to these two sets of records were entirely different. It is one thing for the Master of the Rolls to give instructions to repository keepers, but quite another for him to instruct a Minister of the Crown as to how his Department's papers are to be handled. The responsibility for the conduct of the business of a Government Department rests on the Minister at its head. The Minister's responsibilities are qualified only by the collective responsibility of the Cabinet. Thus a Minister shares his responsibility for the conduct of his Department with his colleagues as a whole, and not with any one of them. This is a principle which recent innovations in the field of Ministerial appointments have done nothing to alter. Though one Minister may have responsibilities which touch on the work of a number of Departments, there is no example of a Minister having powers to instruct another Minister as to how he shall carry out his duties or to apply sanctions to him if he fails to comply. Nor would the principle of the collective responsibility of Ministers allow any Minister to do or say anything which could be interpreted as a public criticism of one of his colleagues. It would thus be impossible for any Minister to exercise powers similar to those which the Act of 1838 gives to the Master of the Rolls ; and if it would be impossible for a Minister it would be unthinkable for someone who was not a Minister. We have no hesitation in saying that if it had been intended that the Public Record Office Act of 1838 should apply to the records of Government Departments it would never have been drafted in the form it was.

#### **"Treasury Control"**

119. It has been suggested to us that there is one Government Department, namely the Treasury, to which the principle we have outlined in the previous

paragraph does not apply. The Treasury, it has been said, does exercise a control over other Government Departments, and, as the Department responsible for Civil Service matters generally, is in a position to exercise executive powers over the way in which Departments handle their records. This suggestion, we believe, derives from a misunderstanding of the term "Treasury Control".

120. The powers of the Treasury in relation to other Government Departments are of two main kinds, namely, those relating to staff and those relating to finance.

121. The powers of the Treasury over staff owe their origin to the general responsibilities of the Prime Minister as First Lord of the Treasury.\* They derive partly from the royal prerogative, and partly from statute. In exercise of the royal prerogative the Treasury is empowered, by Order in Council, to issue regulations for the governance of the Civil Service. But the Treasury, like any other Department, is subordinate to the Cabinet as a whole, and when issuing regulations it is usual for the Treasury to consult the other Departments first. The statutory powers of the Treasury in relation to Departmental staff spring from a number of Acts of Parliament. The Treasury is the Department responsible for establishment matters generally, and where an Act places duties on a Minister it usually authorises him to appoint the necessary staff to carry out these duties, subject to the approval of the Treasury. Thus the Public Record Office Act, 1838, makes the appointment of Assistant Keepers in the Public Record Office a Treasury responsibility, and we shall later in this Report recommend that the Treasury should make enquiries into the staffing of the Public Record Department. The Treasury's powers in relation to staff are of little relevance to a consideration of the concept of "charge and superintendence".

122. Of much greater importance are the powers of the Treasury in relation to finance. But apart from such executive and routine functions as the authorisation with the Comptroller and Auditor-General of issues from the Consolidated Fund Account, the Treasury's financial control over Departments has in fact no foundation other than the ability of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to persuade the Cabinet of the rightness of his views. The Chancellor is a Departmental Minister like the rest of his colleagues and has no power of himself to resolve disagreements between the Treasury and other Departments. Such disagreements have to be referred, ultimately, to the Cabinet itself, and if a Minister disagrees with the Cabinet's decision and refuses to accept it he has no course but to resign. This is true whether the Minister be the Chancellor or the other Minister concerned. In general, however, disputes between the Treasury and Departments are rarely taken to Cabinet level; the Chancellor's special Departmental responsibilities in relation to the budget are well recognised, and Departments know that if it were a regular practice to take disputes to the Cabinet, more often than not the Chancellor would win. Thus the Treasury is in practice in a position to exercise control over the expenditure of other Departments.

123. Because of this, the common-service Departments, such as the Ministry of Works, the Stationery Office, and the Post Office, whose activities touch on the work of all other Departments, are able to curb extravagances in the use made by Departments of the services they provide, through their ability

\* This is the view of Sir Ivor Jennings ("Cabinet Government", Second Edition, 1951). It has been argued, on the other hand, that all the Treasury's powers, including those over staff, derive from its powers over finance. Such a view would strengthen rather than invalidate our argument at this point.

to seek Treasury support over the expenditure involved. But Treasury control of this nature is capable of being applied only where the issues are financial. An unfortunate, but inseparable, feature of the work of reviewing Departmental records is that by not doing it Departments save rather than spend money. Thus it cannot be made subject to control by the purse. Treasury control could become operative only in those cases where a Department's failure to carry out reviewing work led it to demand a disproportionate amount of space in order to house its papers. But it would be difficult to devise any system of rationing space for the housing of papers that would be capable of universal application. Moreover, if Departments failed to review their papers, but stored them in their basements or in corridors, it is possible that no extra expenditure would be involved, and the power of the Treasury to do anything about it would disappear.

ap 124. We must therefore reject as unconstitutional and impracticable any suggestion that the head of one Department, whether the Public Record Department or the Treasury, should be given executive powers over other Departments to ensure that they handle their records properly. Nevertheless, it should be possible to strengthen the ability of the Public Record Department to influence the arrangements made by Departments for selecting their records and transferring them to the Public Record Office, and in our discussion above of the nature of Treasury control we have given an indication of how this may be done. When the work of one Department touches on that of another (and this is a daily occurrence) any difference between Departments is settled firstly by consultation at official level, secondly, and more rarely, by discussion between the Ministers concerned, and thirdly, and much more rarely still, by reference to the Cabinet itself. It is on consultations of this nature, with ultimate resort to the Cabinet, that the whole framework of Government administration depends. We believe it to have been a serious source of weakness to the Public Record Department in the past that it has not been able to make use of this machinery because it has not had a Minister at its head.

#### Position of the Master of the Rolls

125. The reasons that led the framers of the 1838 Act to make the Master of the Rolls responsible for the public records are not entirely clear. As the official custodian of the records of Chancery he was an *ex officio* member of the six Record Commissions which held office between 1800 and 1837. The Select Committee which was appointed in 1836 to enquire into the work of the Record Commission recommended that the responsibility for the care of the records should be entrusted to a reconstituted Commission<sup>40</sup>. The Government took no immediate action on this recommendation, but the Committee's findings that there had been considerable irregularity in the way in which the existing Commission had handled its funds led the Treasury to decide that the Commission's estimates must in future be sanctioned by the Home Secretary<sup>41</sup>. In March 1837 the Home Secretary (Lord John Russell) asked Lord Langdale, the then Master of the Rolls, to be responsible for approving and forwarding the Commission's estimates to him<sup>42</sup>. This temporary arrangement continued until the death of William IV on 20th June 1837 automatically brought the Record Commission to an end six lunar months later on 5th December. On 11th December Lord John Russell asked Lord Langdale to take temporary charge of the business formerly undertaken by the Record Commission, in order to allow the Government time to make up its mind as to what action it should take on the Select Committee's Report<sup>43</sup>. Lord Langdale agreed to do this

on condition that there would be no delay in making permanent arrangements<sup>44</sup>. Asked for his views as to what these arrangements should be, Lord Langdale proposed that the preservation of the records should constitute a distinct branch of the public service subordinate to the Home Office or the Treasury<sup>45</sup>. The Public Record Office Act, 1838, which placed the responsibility for the preservation of the public records on the Master of the Rolls, was drawn up with the approval of Lord Langdale, but the papers which might be expected to show the reasons for this apparent departure from Lord Langdale's earlier proposal cannot be found. It seems likely that the original decision to ask Lord Langdale to supervise the Record Commission's financial business owed more to the qualities of Lord Langdale himself than to anything inherent in the nature of the office he held.

126. The Royal Commission of 1910 commented that "the character and duties of the office of the Master of the Rolls prove his appointment in 1838, as head of the Public Record Office, to have been an anomaly and the fruit of accident"<sup>46</sup>. It pointed out that though he retained his statutory responsibilities he had ceased to control the Public Record Office, while the Deputy Keeper, though nominally a subordinate official, had in fact absolute authority. The Commission considered that "the position of the Master of the Rolls as merely a nominal custodian of the Public Records is unsatisfactory and is not consistent with just principles of administration. We do not think that he should continue to fill in name a position which he has ceased to fill in fact"<sup>47</sup>. The Commission recommended that the control of the Public Record Office should be entrusted to a Commission of nine unpaid members made up in equal proportions of representatives of the main interests involved, namely "the judiciary, the public offices, and the claims of historical study"<sup>48</sup>.

127. We would disagree with the Royal Commission, both in its proposals for remedying the existing state of affairs and in its assessment of the part played by successive distinguished Masters of the Rolls in the conduct of the Public Record Department. To place the Public Record Department into commission would not be consistent with "just principles of administration" as these are understood today. As for the practical responsibilities of the Master of the Rolls in relation to the public records, the late Lord Greene, when he held the office, commented that, though at one time the Master of the Rolls might have been a mere figurehead, he was today consulted on many points—to such an extent that Lord Greene did not think that one man could fill the office of Master of the Rolls adequately so long as to his heavy duties as a judge were added the executive responsibility of preserving the public records. He therefore wondered whether the time had not come for the Master of the Rolls to be relieved of his responsibilities as Keeper of the Records<sup>49</sup>.

128. The fact that the head of the Public Record Department is not a Minister has had a further consequence in making necessary special arrangements for representing the Department in Parliament. Under the Public Record Office Act, 1838, the responsibility for authorising the Public Record Department's publications is vested in the Home Secretary. Over the course of the years the practice has arisen whereby the Chancellor of the Exchequer is answerable to Parliament for the conduct of the Public Record Department, though apart from authorising staff and buildings he is not responsible for it, and neither he nor the Government as a whole control the appointment of the Deputy Keeper. If our proposals concerning the reviewing procedure are accepted, the opportunity given to the

Houses of Parliament to scrutinise Destruction Schedules before they are put into effect will disappear. Considering the other calls on the time of Members of Parliament, and the fact that their existing powers in relation to the Schedules are more apparent than real, we do not think this of any great importance. It would, however, be an advantage in compensation to give Members of Parliament an opportunity to ask questions of the person directly responsible for the Public Record Department.

#### **Appointment of a Minister**

129. We therefore recommend that the headship of the Public Record Department should be transferred from the Master of the Rolls to a Minister of the Crown. We are fortified in making this recommendation, to which we attach the very greatest importance, by the knowledge that it will not mean a break with any ancient or valid tradition; as we have shown, the entrusting of this work to the Master of the Rolls in the first place seems to have been the result of accident rather than design. We consider that this change need in no way jeopardise the continuance of satisfactory arrangements for the care of legal records, or for the record duties at present placed on the Master of the Rolls by enactments other than the Public Record Office Acts. The choice of a Minister to take charge of the Department would seem to lie between the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Lord President of the Council, and the Home Secretary. The decision would be a matter for the Prime Minister of the day, and we make no recommendation on the point.

#### **Public Record Department**

130. The prime responsibility of the Public Record Department would be, as now, to administer the Public Record Office as a place at which the public records were stored and, in due time, made available for inspection. The Department's ability to exercise this responsibility would be dependent on the other Departments reviewing their papers properly, and transferring regularly to the Public Record Office those records which were due to be preserved. These are matters for which, in accordance with constitutional practice, Departments would themselves be responsible. But if Departments failed to carry out these obligations the Public Record Department would be unable to perform its own proper function, and the Government as a whole would have failed in its duty to make proper arrangements for the preservation of its records. We therefore recommend that the Public Record Department should be made responsible for co-ordinating the arrangements to be made by Departments for the selection and transfer of their records for permanent preservation. This would mean that Departments would have to consult with, and obtain the agreement of, the Public Record Department concerning their arrangements for implementing the reviewing procedure. It would also mean that the Public Record Department should satisfy itself that the arrangements made by Departments were being properly operated and that the reviewing of records was not being allowed to fall into arrear.

#### **Records Administration Officer**

131. In order to enable the Public Record Department to carry out the functions which we have suggested for it in the previous paragraph, we recommend the appointment of an officer within the Department charged with the oversight of records before their transfer to the Public Record Office. We shall refer to this official as the Records Administration Officer. We make no recommendation as to what should be his rank beyond saying

that this must be sufficient to enable him to hold his own with the Directors of Establishments with whom he will have to deal ; as to his status we recommend that he should not be subordinate to the senior archivist (the Deputy Keeper)\*. We attach the greatest importance to the appointment of a capable official to this post.

#### *Inspecting Officers*

132. To assist the Records Administration Officer we recommend the appointment of a number of officials whose duties would be to keep in touch with Departments and act as liaison officers on behalf of the Public Record Department. We shall refer to these officials as the "Inspecting Officers". Their number would not need to be large, and we suggest that each should be responsible for dealing with a group of Departments. We would not wish to specify from what source the Inspecting Officers should be recruited ; possible sources would include Departments themselves and the Public Record Department.

#### *First Review*

133. The main function of the Inspecting Officers at the First Review would be to see that Departments were in fact keeping up-to-date with their reviewing work. There would be no question of their trying to do the job for Departments, whose Record Officers would be better qualified to do it themselves. But the Inspecting Officers' contacts with other Departments, as well as with the archivists (see paragraph 136 below) in their own Department, would give them a breadth of experience which would be of use to Departmental Record Officers in working out solutions to their own problems. Thus the Inspecting Officers would be well qualified to suggest to a Departmental Record Officer the kind of things he should not overlook in deciding what it was necessary for his Department to keep "for its own purposes". In particular, they might assist the Departmental Record Officer to look through his papers and to decide which were capable of being classified with sufficient precision to enable them to be included in the Department's classified list. In the case of those papers which were not capable of being classified, the Inspecting Officers could, by test check and observation, ensure themselves that the Departmental Record Officers were making a success of their work. In course of time we should expect that the Inspecting Officers would become a useful repository of knowledge on such subjects as the effect of different registration procedures on the conduct of reviewing work, and that they would be able to help Departments by advising them as to how their own arrangements might be improved.

134. Whenever a new form of "particular instance" papers is created in a Department we recommend that the decision as to whether any of the papers should be retained should be taken by the Inspecting Officers sitting as a Committee, in consultation with both the Departmental Record Officer concerned and the archivists on the staff of the Public Record Department. The Committee would need to keep in close touch with the Interdepartmental Committee on Social and Economic Research, and consult with members of the historical and other professions as appropriate.

135. We believe that assistance of this sort would be welcomed by Departments and would lead to a general improvement in the standard of reviewing work. We would stress that it is not our intention that the Inspecting Officers should make detailed rules for the execution of the

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\* See paragraph 142 below.

reviewing procedure, or that the Public Record Department should require Departments to adopt uniform arrangements. The interests of the Public Record Department would be limited to ensuring that the reviewing work was being done, and being done properly; within these limits the question of how the work was done would be a matter entirely for Departments themselves, though, as we have indicated in the previous paragraph, we think that the Inspecting Officer would be able to give them useful advice. Any disagreement between an Inspecting Officer and a Department as to the adequacy of the latter's reviewing arrangements should be resolved in accordance with the normal machinery for the conduct of interdepartmental relations, with ultimate resort to the Cabinet if necessary. But in view of the special responsibilities of the Minister in charge of the Public Record Department we consider it most unlikely that disagreements would need to be referred for settlement to so high a level.

#### *Second Review*

136. In paragraph 87 above we have recommended that the decision as to what is to be retained at the Second Review should be taken by the Departmental Record Officer in conjunction with a representative of the Public Record Department. We recommend that at the Second Review the Public Record Department should be represented by the appropriate Inspecting Officer. In his exercise of the historical criterion we suggest that the Inspecting Officer should, where necessary, take into consultation the archivists in the Public Record Department. The archivists (Assistant Keepers) are the persons most in contact with research workers, and the usefulness of their knowledge of what research workers wish to consult will increase as more and more twentieth century records are opened to the public. For purposes of this Review we recommend the establishment of a panel of advisers, who would be available for consultation by the Public Record Department as required. We recommend that consultation should be more frequent than is the practice at present, but would stress that the functions of members of the panel would be advisory only; the decision as to what was to be permanently preserved would be taken by the Departments themselves with the assistance, and under the guidance, of the Public Record Department.

#### *Co-ordination of Preservation Practice*

137. We have referred, in paragraph 53 above, to the present inconsistency of practice between Departments in the selection of papers for preservation. We believe that there is a fairly wide field over which it will be possible for the Public Record Department to standardise the preservation policies of Departments, and so not only improve the quality of the records preserved but also avoid unnecessary duplication. We recommend that the Public Record Department should issue for the information of Departmental Record Officers a Guide on the lines of the "Notes for Clerks of Stationery" issued by Her Majesty's Stationery Office as part of the "Stationery Office Guide". This Guide would need to be more detailed and specific than the Memorandum on the Elimination of Official Documents at present issued to Departments by the Public Record Department. One subject on which such a work might give general guidance would be the preservation of papers of which copies were held by more than one Department. It might, for instance, suggest that the responsibility for preserving Committee papers (unless they were accompanied by written matter) should rest on the Department providing the Secretary; and that series of telegrams from Missions abroad should be preserved only by the Foreign Office, and Cabinet papers only by the Cabinet Office. The Guide might also include information

showing the kind of records most in demand among persons using the Public Record Office ; for the more the Departmental Record Officer knows of the requirements of those who use the records in the Public Record Office, the better will he be able to use his judgment in deciding which papers should be preserved at the Second Review. We consider it important that the Public Record Department should exercise judgments of comparative value by comparing the amount and nature of the records preserved by the various Departments. It would thus be able to recommend modifications in Departmental practice so as to ensure that the contents of the Public Record Office were national in scope and not a series of *ad hoc* collections from different Departments.

138. The Guide which we have suggested should also specify the arrangements for the disposal of the papers of defunct Departments, and for the handing over of papers whenever business was transferred from one Department to another. These are probably the occasions on which there is the greatest danger of important papers being inadvertently destroyed, and we recommend that the Inspecting Officers should be particularly vigilant at them. They would need, in particular, to keep a close watch on papers in the offices of those Ministers, such as the Lord Privy Seal and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, whose functions are liable to frequent change.

139. The "Notes for Clerks of Stationery" to which we have referred contains a set of model "Regulations for the Supervision of Printing, and Stationery Work" which the Stationery Office suggests might be issued within Departments over the signature of the Head of the Department concerned. We recommend that the Public Record Department should consider the possibility of including a similar model in its own Guide.

#### *Examination of Records in the Public Record Office*

140. An additional duty which we would wish to see placed on the Public Record Department would be the examination of records in the Public Record Office itself, with a view to determining whether any of them might be destroyed. One of the main purposes of the 1877 Act was to enable valueless material that had already been deposited in the Public Record Office to be destroyed. A considerable quantity of records in the Public Record Office was destroyed in consequence, but few such records have been disposed of during the last forty years. It should be the aim, as far as possible, to ensure that useless material does not reach the Public Record Office in the first place, but this is an ideal which cannot always be achieved. We recommend that the archivists in the Public Record Department should submit the papers in their charge to a continuous review, to see whether it will be possible, with the agreement of the Departments concerned, to dispose of any of them. By removing unwanted lumber this should free space (and, in view of the repair work that would be necessary, labour) for material of greater value.

#### *Organisation of the Public Record Department*

141. The recommendations we have made concerning the duties of the Public Record Department will necessitate changes in both its organisation and its staff, and we recommend that the Treasury should conduct an early enquiry into the subject so as to determine what should be the establishment of the Department.\*

\* We understand that an enquiry into the existing organisation of the Department is at present being conducted by the Organisation and Methods Division of the Treasury.

142. One effect of bringing the Public Record Department into the normal administrative machinery of Government should be to increase the amount of time spent by the Department in consultation with other Departments. We consider this to be all to the good. At present, when the Public Record Department wishes to make important representations to other Departments, and in particular to the Treasury, it enlists the support of the Master of the Rolls. If, as we have proposed, a Minister were made responsible for the Department, the Master of the Rolls would no longer be available to carry out these tasks. But we consider it important that, besides being represented by a Minister, the Public Record Department should have as its senior official someone with the status and authority to ensure that it was properly represented at the official level. We therefore recommend the establishment of a new post of official head of the Public Record Department, with the title of Keeper of the Records. The holder of this post would be responsible for the general administration of the Department in the same way as the official heads of other Government Departments, and would be its Accounting Officer. He would thus assume responsibility for the administrative work which is at present performed partly by the Deputy Keeper of the Records and partly by the Master of the Rolls. This would be an administrative post, though there would be every advantage in promoting to it an archivist from the Department's staff if he had the requisite administrative ability and were otherwise judged to be the best person available. (The Public Record Department would correspond in this respect to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Permanent Secretaryship of which, though an administrative post, has up to now been filled by a scientist.) Serving under the Keeper of the Records would be the Records Administration Officer with the duties outlined in paragraph 131 above, and the Deputy Keeper (the senior archivist) who would be in charge of the records preserved in the Public Record Office.

#### *Report to Parliament*

143. We recommend that the Minister in charge of the Public Record Department should be required to present an annual report to Parliament, in substitution for the report which the Deputy Keeper is at present required to submit to the Sovereign. This report should give an account of the work done by the Department in the previous year, and a statement of the amount and nature of the records received from Departments. We suggest that the report might also contain, as an appendix, a table showing the amount of papers which each Department had destroyed in the previous year in the course of its First and Second Reviews: for these figures Departments would, of course, be themselves responsible.

#### *Advisory Council*

144. Since 1948 the Public Record Department has been advised on its publication policy by a Consultative Committee on Publications, whose members are drawn from the Universities, on the nomination of their Vice-Chancellors. We consider that the practice of consultation might usefully be extended by the appointment of a body to advise the Minister on those aspects of the Department's work which affect the interests of those who make use of its services. We therefore recommend the establishment of an Advisory Council, with members drawn from the judiciary, the legal profession, and the universities. The Council should consist of members of sufficient eminence to give authority to its recommendations, without being too large to prevent it from being an effective body. In view of the close connection that

has existed over the past hundred years between the public records and the office of Master of the Rolls we recommend that the Master of the Rolls should be invited to act as Chairman of the Council.

### 3. CABINET OFFICE RECORDS AND THE QUESTION OF ACCESS

#### **Cabinet Office Papers**

145. The establishment in the twentieth century of a Secretariat to the Cabinet is likely to prove as important an archival event, in its own context, as the inauguration of the practice of enrolment in the thirteenth century or the rise of the office of Secretary in the fifteenth. During the nineteenth century and up to 1916 the Prime Minister was personally responsible for arranging the Cabinet's Agenda; no Secretary was present at Cabinet meetings and no formal minutes were taken. Thus, apart from such accounts of Cabinet business as may be found among the private papers of former Sovereigns or on Departmental files, no records are in existence of Cabinet meetings prior to 1916. The first Secretary of the Cabinet was appointed towards the end of that year, on the occasion of the setting up of the first War Cabinet. A Secretariat to the Committee of Imperial Defence had been in existence since 1904, and it was out of this that the Cabinet Secretariat was formed. The Committee of Imperial Defence was suspended on the outbreak of war in 1939 and the two Secretariats merged into a single Department known as the "Offices of the War Cabinet". This is now called the "Cabinet Office".

146. The main papers in the possession of the Cabinet Office are the records of the Committee of Imperial Defence from 1904 to 1939 and Cabinet records from 1916. These latter consist of the Minutes and Papers of the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees, each of which are bound in separate series. Also bound in volume form are the preparatory papers leading up to, and the Minutes of, important conferences for which the Cabinet Office has provided the Secretariat. The Cabinet Office is responsible for certain historical records to which we refer below. Finally, like all Government Departments, the Cabinet Office has a number of files of its own, some containing valuable material and some routine papers of the type that could be destroyed within five years of their passing out of active use. All these papers come within the scope of the Public Record Office Acts; but though the Cabinet Office has subscribed to the Master of the Rolls' Rules, no Schedule has yet been made authorising the destruction of any of its papers.

147. The Cabinet Office records, containing as they do copies of all papers submitted to the Cabinet or its Committees, as well as the reports of the discussions and decisions taken concerning them, comprise the most valuable single collection of modern material for historical purposes that can be obtained from official sources. It is thus most desirable that the historian should at some stage be granted access to them. To give this access, however, raises issues of both administrative and constitutional importance. It is essential on the one hand that Government administration should not be handicapped by the premature publication of confidential information; and on the other that nothing should be done which would impair either the convention of the collective responsibility of the Government or the responsibility to Parliament of individual Ministers for their own Departments. We believe—and in this we have had the benefit of the advice of the Secretary of the Cabinet—that both these dangers could be avoided if Cabinet papers were transferred to the Public Record Office and opened to the public 50 years after their creation. Subject to the approval of Her Majesty, we recommend that this should be done. This would mean that records of the

Committee of Imperial Defence would first become available for inspection in 1955, and records of the Cabinet and other papers in 1967.

#### War Records

148. The Cabinet Office is responsible for two series of Official Histories of the Second World War—a Military Series, which is concerned with strategy and operations, and a Civil Series which deals with the civil war effort and the economic and social problems caused by the war. The main material for the Civil Series is to be found in Cabinet Office papers and departmental files. Of the material for the Military Series, papers relating to the strategic conduct of the war are for the most part located among the ordinary records of the Cabinet Office and the Service Departments. Papers relating to operations include the records of the three main Allied Headquarters—in North West Europe: the Mediterranean and the Middle East; and South East Asia—the papers of units of the Royal Navy, the War Diaries of formations and units of the Army, and the Operations Record Books of formations and units of the Royal Air Force. The records of the Allied Headquarters are held by the Cabinet Office. The War Diaries are also temporarily in the custody of the Cabinet Office, but they form part of the records of the War Office, to which Department they will in due course be returned. Ships' Papers and Operations Record Books are in the custody of the Admiralty and the Air Ministry respectively. It will be convenient to discuss all these types of records together.

149. Apart from those dealing with personnel, the most important of a Ship's Papers are the Ship's Book and the Ship's Log. A Ship's Book records the history of the ship's construction and subsequent maintenance from the time it is ordered to the time it passes out of commission. The Admiralty has at present in its possession Ships' Books dating from the turn of the century, and these occupy about 1,500 feet of racking. Though no final decision has yet been taken concerning them, the Admiralty proposes that, in general, only one Book should be retained for each class of ship. Ships' Logs which have accumulated since 1900 occupy some 4,300 feet of shelving space—2,000 feet each in respect of large and small ships, and 300 feet in respect of submarines. They are now accumulating at the rate of about 60 feet a year. The Admiralty has proposed that the Ships' Logs for large ships and submarines only should be retained, but is doubtful whether it would be necessary to retain more than samples of the logs of small auxiliary vessels, the majority of which have never been in action.

150. The records of the Allied Headquarters in the Cabinet Office occupy some 5,000 feet of racking and the War Diaries 9,000 feet. To this must be added the space required for some 50 map presses. The Cabinet Office also holds on loan from the War Office certain Departmental files, occupying some 2,000 feet of racking.

151. The Air Ministry holds some 500 feet of War Diaries relating to units and formations of the first World War. Since 1936 it has been the practice for each unit and formation of the Royal Air Force to submit to the Air Ministry each month, in war and in peace, an Operations Record Book. These Books occupy about 3,000 feet of racking and are accumulating at the rate of 50 feet a year.

152. These documents, which contain records of practical experience in war by sea, land, and air, constitute a valuable source of study for the Fighting Services. They also provide the original source material for the historian, and their destruction would not be justified on the grounds that

they had already been worked over in the process of writing the official histories. The information which they contain cannot, in general, be elicited by means of statistical samples. We therefore recommend that (with the exception of Ships' Books, concerning which we would endorse the Admiralty's proposals) all these records relating to wartime should be retained; and that the Public Record Department should discuss with the three Service Departments, which of the Ships' Logs and Operations Record Books relating to peacetime should be preserved permanently. After consulting the representatives of the Cabinet Office, the Admiralty, and the Air Ministry, we are of the opinion that these records could be opened to public inspection after 50 years. We recommend that the same principles should apply to the corresponding records of the First World War.

#### Access

153. If it were possible to consider a Department's records in isolation there would no doubt be a number of classes which could be opened to public inspection after a period shorter than the 50 years we have proposed for Cabinet records. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the quality of "unselfconsciousness", to which we have referred in paragraph 111 above, would be likely to be impaired if an official knew that what he wrote would be made available to public inspection during his lifetime. The susceptibilities of the individual in this respect are not less important than the natural desire of the historian to obtain his material as soon after the event as possible. It has, moreover, been submitted to us that if papers were opened to public inspection before 50 years had elapsed, it would be necessary for someone to examine them in order to ensure that they did not include copies of Cabinet Papers or extracts from Cabinet Minutes. We do not consider this particular objection insuperable, as it would be possible to combine this examination with the process of stripping\* files before their transfer to the Public Record Office. But there are two practical reasons which lead us to propose that, at any rate for the time being, there should be a general rule that Departmental records should be opened to public inspection after 50 years and not before. The first is that the proposals which we have made in this Report will, in the early years, sufficiently tax the resources of the Public Record Department and Departments generally to make it undesirable to introduce complications concerning the dates on which records will be opened to the public. The second is that the rule which we have proposed, generally applied, would of itself result in an immediate and substantial increase in the number of Departmental records made available for public inspection. This is not a subject on which we would wish to make a final pronouncement and we suggest that the question whether some classes of records should be opened before the lapse of 50 years might be examined some five years after the introduction of the new reviewing procedure.

154. A general rule, such as we have proposed, would not prevent the granting, as now, of special permission to individuals to examine certain records which were less than 50 years old, if this were thought desirable. The decision to allow such an examination of its records or, alternatively, to withhold from public inspection records which were more than 50 years old, should continue to rest with the individual Department concerned. We recommend, however, that the Public Record Department should be consulted on both these points in order to enable it to be a source of information leading to the establishment of some sort of common practice.

\* See paragraphs 41, and 77 note.

between Departments. We recommend that the opening of records to the public after 50 years should be automatic unless a Department gave notice that it did not wish the rule to apply to a particular class of its own records. If the Public Record Department considered that a Department was being unreasonable in taking a decision, it would have open to it the machinery described in the previous Section of this Report for making its views known.

155. The general effect of our proposals should be to ensure that there is a regular annual flow of records to the Public Record Office 25 years after their creation, and that these will be opened for public inspection 50 years after their creation. Departments will retain in their own possession after 25 years only those records to which they need to have constant access, or whose further retention for a period is desirable on administrative but not historical grounds. (We recommend that the Cabinet Office should be an exception to this rule.) Participation of the Inspecting Officers in Departments' Second Reviews will mean that the Public Record Department will know which records are retained by Departments and so be able to make representations to Departments, both generally and whenever any of the records concerned are approaching 50 years of age. The Public Record Department will thus be able to assure itself, and so those who use its services, that all those records which it is practicable to open to the public after 50 years are in fact available for public inspection at that time.

#### 4. TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

##### Introducing the New Procedure

156. Before the reviewing procedure for registered papers which we have outlined in paragraphs 77 to 86 above can be put into effect, it will be necessary for some Departments to make changes in their registration arrangements. Once the necessary modifications have been made, there should be no difficulty in applying the new procedure to any files which may be created subsequently.

157. But the papers already existing in Departments at the time of the introduction of the arrangements for the new procedure will, of course, have been registered under the old arrangements. The question therefore arises whether they should be reviewed in accordance with the old procedure or with the new. Some of them would not under the old arrangements become due for review for many years to come. To dispose of them under the old procedure would mean that, for perhaps as long as a quarter of a century to come, the Public Record Department and Departments generally would have to operate two different reviewing systems simultaneously. Such an arrangement would be most unsatisfactory.

158. We therefore propose that once the new reviewing procedure has been introduced in a Department, all that Department's papers, whenever they were created, should be reviewed in accordance with it. This would mean that any of the files created previously which had been out of active use for less than five years would come up for a First Review under the new procedure as soon as they had been out of active use for five years; whereas files which had been out of active use for more than five years would come up for a "Second" Review as soon as they were 25 years old. In the case of some of the files which had been out of active use for less than five years it would be necessary to modify slightly the procedure for conducting the First Review. It might not, for example, be possible to review some of these files by reference only to their titles, in which

case it would be necessary to examine the files themselves. This examination need amount to no more than a quick glance through those files which it is intended to destroy, to make sure that no papers of administrative importance have inadvertently been placed on them. There would be no need for the present meticulous examination of individual papers with a view to determining whether they contain anything which might be of historical or other non-administrative importance.

159. If these proposals for dealing with existing papers are accepted, both First and "Second" Reviews will, in some Departments, become due immediately on the introduction of the new procedure. If the rule for the introduction of the new procedure were to be simply as we have stated it in the previous paragraph—namely that all previously created files which had been out of active use for more than five years should be retained until they were 25 years old and then given a "Second" Review—not only would a vast amount of space be required to accommodate them, but the second stage in the reviewing procedure would become impossible to operate because of the mass of papers involved. Among these previously created files there might be some which were of no importance but which had been retained for ten years after passing out of active use solely for the reason that the Department concerned had not got round to the job of reviewing them; or others which had been retained for five and a half years after passing out of active use because the retention period in the Department's existing Destruction Schedule was six years when it might very well have been five. If the second stage of the new procedure is to be capable of being operated in relation to existing files it is essential that their number should be greatly reduced by the elimination of unimportant files of this sort.

160. This will entail a measure of delay before the new reviewing procedure can be introduced. We recommend that the period involved should be not more than five years; that the necessary legislation should be introduced as early as possible in that period; and that in the meantime Departments should be required to work over\* their existing papers so as to be in a position to operate the new procedure not later than the end of the five-year period. In the following paragraphs we shall suggest ways in which the last of these three recommendations might be put into effect.

#### **Working over Existing Papers**

161. In order to assist Departments in working over their existing papers and in making arrangements for the introduction of the new procedure we recommend that the posts of Records Administration Officer, Inspecting Officers, and Departmental Record Officers should be instituted at once. It would then be for each individual Department, in conjunction with and with the agreement of the Inspecting Officer concerned, to draw up its own programme for working over its existing papers and introducing the new procedure. The Records Administration Officer would be responsible for supervising these arrangements, and we therefore think it essential that the official appointed to the post should have had a wide experience of the way in which Departmental business is conducted.

162. Of the papers which are in existence in Departments today—and especially those the reviewing of which is overdue†—a substantial proportion

\* We use the term "work over" to include the reviewing of papers, the destruction of those which it is not intended to preserve, and the setting aside of papers for a "second" review at the end of the appropriate period.

† It is convenient to describe those papers the reviewing of which is overdue as "arrears", though there is in fact no definition of this term (nor, for that matter, of the term "overdue") which under present circumstances would be capable of being applied to all Departments.

consists of "particular instance" papers. Because these consist of groups of papers, some of which are very large, to review them should create less of a problem than to review a similar quantity of other papers. To dispose of the accumulated personal records of servicemen, for example, would involve the taking of only one decision, but this would enable the future of some 200,000 feet of arrears to be determined. In paragraph 109 above we have recommended the appointment of a Committee to decide which "particular instance" papers, and in what quantities, should be preserved. We recommend that this Committee should be under the chairmanship of the Records Administration Officer, and that its members should include the Inspecting Officers, a member of the Central Statistical Office with knowledge of the use of statistical samples, and representatives of the Departments concerned as required. We should expect the Committee to keep in close touch with the Interdepartmental Committee on Social and Economic Research, and to consult with members of the historical and similar professions as appropriate. Until this Committee has reached its decisions, Departments will not be able (either by transfer to the Public Record Office or by destruction) to dispose of any of their arrears which consist of "particular instance" papers. It is important therefore, that there should be no undue delay before the Committee starts work.

163. The quantity of existing papers, other than "particular instance" papers, held by Departments, varies greatly from one Department to another. Enquiries have shown that about one in every two Departments is behind-hand with its reviewing work, but that a substantial proportion of the total quantity of these arrears is to be found in not more than seven or eight Departments. One of these Departments has in its possession unreviewed documents dating from the latter half of the 18th Century.\* Another has estimated that at the present rate of progress it would take over 35 years to work over its arrears—and this without making any provision for the reviewing of papers which have been, or will be, created subsequently. The amount of arrears in another Department is more than twelve times the amount of new papers which it creates each year. In yet another Department, with the exception of accounting documents no papers dating from later than 1940 have yet been reviewed. The quantity of unreviewed papers in another Department is large, not so much on account of its reviewing work having fallen into arrear, but because its principal Destruction Schedule allows no papers to be destroyed before the lapse of 25 years. To work over all of these papers within the five-year period allowed will present the Departments concerned with formidable problems.

164. It may indeed be said that the problem posed by the need to dispose of unimportant existing papers consists almost in its entirety of the sum of the individual problems of this handful of Departments. The remaining Departments should have little difficulty in working over their existing papers in the time allowed. They should, moreover, be able to do this without any modification of the existing legal requirements as to the destruction of documents, other than the reduction, where necessary, of the retention periods in the Destruction Schedules. As we have explained in paragraph 47 above, the legal authority for doing this already exists.

165. We have referred to the problem of working over existing papers as a collection of problems, because in no two of the Departments con-

\* These, in volume form, are at present stacked on the floor at the "Limbo" Repository at Hayes. The Royal Commission of 1910 reported that a number of 17th and 18th Century records from this same Department had recently been found in the attics of the Department's building. Whether the documents now lying on the floor at Hayes include any of those which forty years ago were lying in the attics we are unable to say.

cerned are the circumstances entirely similar. One Department has stated that it has got into arrear with its reviewing work primarily because of a shortage of staff for binding the records which it wishes to transfer to the Public Record Office. The most effective way of expediting its reviewing work might thus be to change its method of preparing records for transfer to the Public Record Office by dispensing with, or simplifying, the binding of documents. Another Department would probably be enabled to work over its existing papers in the time allowed, with its existing staff, simply by a better organisation of its reviewing work. There is no general solution of the problem that would be applicable to all the Departments concerned; the solutions to be constructed for the group of Departments with the biggest problems will need to be specifically devised to suit their own individual requirements.

166. It will be necessary that the decision to be taken concerning files which at the time of the introduction of the new procedure would have been more than 25 years old should be a final one. In the case of files which are less than 25 years old, but which have been out of active use for more than five years, Inspecting Officers and Departments will have greater latitude over the question of finality. It may be that in respect of certain files the most satisfactory arrangement would be to come to an immediate decision as to whether they should be retained permanently; in the case of others it may be thought desirable to take only an interim decision concerning them—after the nature of the decision to be taken at future First Reviews—and to leave them to come up for a Second Review at the appointed time. These are matters which can be settled only by an examination of the papers concerned, and we think it should be left to the discretion of the Inspecting Officers as to what precise methods should be adopted.

167. Some of the Departments concerned might find it possible to implement these arrangements within the terms of the existing Destruction Schedules, subject only to the reduction of the retention periods where necessary, and the abandonment of the present practice of examining each individual paper. If a Department was unable to implement the procedure in this way, we recommend that its present Destruction Schedules should be replaced by a new and short Schedule (similar to those at present in operation in relation to films)\* giving it a discretion broadly on the lines which it would have under the new procedure as to what papers it destroyed and what retained for a Second Review later. It would be necessary to inform Parliament of these proposed modifications in the existing procedure.

168. In order to work over their existing papers within the time allowed it would almost certainly be necessary for some Departments to employ additional staff on reviewing work. One or two Departments are at present employing on reviewing their arrears Civil Servants of the Executive class who have recently retired and been temporarily re-engaged for this purpose. They find this a most satisfactory arrangement, as the experience which these officers have gained of the work of their Departments is a valuable asset in carrying out the present system. We should like to bring this arrangement to the attention of the Treasury and of other Departments in their consideration of how the necessary additional staff is to be obtained.

169. In the course of this Report we have repeatedly laid stress on the need to match procedures to the needs of individual Departments. Experience may show the desirability of modifying some of the recom-

\* See paragraph 218 below

mendations which we have made in this Section of the Report in so far as they affect individual Departments. We should be surprised if this were not so. If, for example, a Department should find it practicable to introduce the new procedure in advance of the general date—but after the necessary legislation had been enacted—there would probably be no harm in its being allowed to do so. These are problems that will best be solved in the light of circumstances at the time.

#### 5. MICROPHOTOGRAPHY

170. We have given serious consideration to the possibilities of reproducing copies of records on microfilm as a method of reducing the amount of space required to accommodate them. At an early stage in our enquiries we found that there was among the historians whom we consulted a considerable body of opinion in favour of using microphotography, on the grounds that experience in the United States had shown that it was economical to do so. It was suggested that if, by the use of microphotography, the amount of space required to accommodate the records could be reduced, there would be less need to destroy papers, and the problem of selecting records for preservation would become that much easier. The results of our investigations in this country did not support these contentions, but we thought it desirable, nevertheless, to seek first hand information concerning American experience in this field. Mr. Chambers and Professor Habakkuk have accordingly visited the United States on our behalf. They have reported that experience in that country has shown that microphotography as a means of saving space is not at present an economical proposition in normal circumstances. This report, coupled with the results of our enquiries into the subject in this country, have led us to the conclusion that microphotography cannot at present play any great part in the arrangements to be made for the preservation of records.

171. The principle of microphotography is the simple one of reducing to very small proportions the records to be stored, and then magnifying them up again whenever anyone wishes to consult them. Documents are photographed on 35 or 16 millimetre film and the originals may then be destroyed. Whenever it is necessary to consult a record, the microfilm is placed in a "reader" in which a photographic image of a size equal to or greater than the original is projected on to a screen. We have ourselves examined various types of "reader" and can testify that the image they produce is clear and easily readable.

172. Though no one can say with accuracy how long photographs recorded on microfilm will last, it is claimed that tests have shown that the life of microfilm will at least equal that of good quality rag paper. The main disadvantage of microfilm from the research worker's point of view is that it does not permit of easy cross-reference from one document to another. A "reader" can give only one image at a time, and it is therefore impossible, when microfilm is being used, for the student to have a number of records set out before him for reference.

173. The use of microphotography for archival purposes can be an economical proposition only if the capital and recurrent costs of making and storing the microfilm are less than the capital and recurrent costs of storing the originals. If records are retained on microfilm instead of in the original it should be possible to reduce the amount of storage space required by over 95 per cent. One linear foot of normal sized documents, for example, can be reproduced on two and a half reels of 35 millimetre

film, at a saving in space of 96 per cent. If 16 millimetre film is used the saving is over 98 per cent. The use of microphotography would thus effect very great savings in the capital cost of providing accommodation for the storage of records.

174. But if the capital cost of providing accommodation for microfilm is low, the cost of reproducing the records on microfilm is high. More important than the costs of the photography (film, camera, labour, etc.) are the costs of the preparatory work involved. Documents must be taken from their file covers, paper clips, pins or tags removed, and each paper separated from its neighbours and flattened ready to be photographed. Papers which vary in size and shape (of the type normally found in files), or papers which are folded, will slow down the speed of operation considerably. Papers containing data on both back and front must be turned over and photographed twice, unless a camera is being used which is capable of photographing both sides simultaneously.

175. Microfilm cameras at present in this country are of two types, known as the "automatic" and the "continuous".

176. With the automatic camera it is possible to photograph, on an average, about 2,000 single-sided documents in a day. The exposure is made automatically as each document is fed into the machine. Experiments have shown that the great majority of Departmental records, if they were to be reduced to microfilm, would have to be photographed on this type of camera. Our enquiries have demonstrated that the cost of doing so (including the cost of preparation) would be much more than the capital cost of providing storage accommodation for the original documents.

177. The continuous type of camera can be operated at very high speeds, and in exceptional cases may make as many as 10,000 exposures in an hour. Some of these cameras can photograph both sides of a document simultaneously. It is, however, only possible to use a continuous camera if the documents are all of a kind. They must also be in good condition, for if their edges are damaged the automatic feeding apparatus is liable to become jammed. The number of papers in the possession of Departments which would be capable of being photographed by the continuous type of camera is not very great. Our present information is that the cost of reproducing documents on microfilm by use of the continuous flow camera would be as much as, or more than, the capital cost of providing accommodation for them in the original.

178. To compare the recurrent costs of preserving permanently documents in the original and preserving permanently microfilm copies of them is difficult because experience of the latter is very limited. The present indications are that the recurrent costs of storing microfilm will be less in some respects than the recurrent costs of storing documents in the original, but greater in others. By reducing the amount of accommodation required, the use of microfilm should reduce the costs of heating and cleaning; the extent of this reduction will depend on the respective standards of temperature and humidity control required for the storage of papers and films. An extra item of expenditure in the case of microfilm would be the provision and servicing of "readers". It has also been suggested that whenever a film is required for consultation a positive copy should be made of it so as to protect the original negative from possible damage. Opinion differs as to whether this is in fact necessary; if positive copies have to be made this would of course increase both capital and recurrent costs.

179. Experience in the United States and in this country may be summed up as showing that it is generally uneconomical to use microphotography merely in order to save space. More than 90 per cent. of the microfilming equipment and material supplied to industrial concerns in the United States is used for record-making, and not record-storing, purposes. Copying and recording by microfilm instead of by hand or by manually operated machines has been proved to be worthwhile primarily as a labour saving device, and only secondarily as a method of saving space.

180. We are thus of the opinion that microphotography does not provide a satisfactory means of reducing the bulk of present day records. Nevertheless we do not rule out the possibility that technical developments may in future make the use of microphotography for archival purposes worthwhile. We therefore recommend that the Public Record Department should keep developments in this field under constant review. In particular we suggest that once the Committee on "particular instance" papers has come to its decisions, the Public Record Department should make a detailed survey of the costs of reproducing on microfilm one class of papers from among those selected by the Committee for retention. For if microphotography is to be of use for archival purposes in the future, we feel sure that it will be in relation to uniform documents of the "particular instance" type, rather than to the kind of papers normally found on files.

#### 6. ACCOMMODATION

##### Quantity of Records Involved

181. The Public Record Department has at present at its disposal for the storage of records the Public Record Office building in Chancery Lane, with accommodation for 157,000 feet of records, and a branch repository at Ashridge Park with accommodation for 120,000 feet. Only 50,000 feet of the accommodation at Ashridge Park is at present occupied, and it is estimated that when the necessary racking has been installed there will be room there for a maximum of 178,000 feet of records.

182. In paragraph 28 above we have stated that according to figures supplied by Departments themselves the quantity of records at present held by Departments which will ultimately be transferred to the Public Record Office is about 600,000 feet; and that this will be added to at the rate of about 14,000 feet a year. On the basis of these figures, well over 400,000 feet of storage space, in addition to that already available or likely to become available at Chancery Lane and Ashridge Park, will be required merely to house records that have been created so far. This is the equivalent of over two and a half times the accommodation available and occupied at Chancery Lane. To house records created in the future a further 14,000 feet will be required each year, or a new building with accommodation equal to that in Chancery Lane every eleven years.

183. Fortunately the position is not so serious as this. Of the 600,000 feet of what is considered to be preservable material in the hands of Departments no less than 200,000 feet is accounted for by the records of individual service-men—160,000 feet in the possession of the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, and 40,000 feet in the possession of the War Office and the Air Ministry. Another large item is the 40,000 feet of records held by the Registry of Shipping and Seamen. As a result of the enquiry into "particular instance" papers which we have proposed we should not expect that anything like 240,000 feet of these records would be preserved.

184. Similarly, the figure of 14,000 feet of preservable records which Departments are said to be accumulating each year includes a figure for "particular instance" papers which we should expect to see considerably reduced. Also included among the 14,000 feet is a not inconsiderable amount of papers which some Departments need to retain for very long periods on administrative grounds, and concerning whose ultimate disposal they have not yet reached a decision. Thus 2,900 feet of the whole consists of Estate Duty Office Records. Some of these the Board of Inland Revenue is required by Statute to preserve for ever; others it needs to keep for its own purposes for a hundred years or more, but how many of them would ultimately be transferred to the Public Record Office it is unable to say. Another factor which has caused the figure of annual additions to be so high is that some Departments have not been in the practice of reviewing their papers as thoroughly as they might. One Department, for example, has informed us that under present arrangements 650 feet of its records each year will be preserved permanently. None of these records are at present being passed to the Public Record Office, as the Department wishes to keep them itself and has adequate space in which to do so. It has, however, stated that if staff were available to review these records more thoroughly, it would be possible to reduce the bulk of those permanently preserved to about one-tenth of the present figure.

185. The amount of material likely to be preserved permanently should thus be considerably less than the figures quoted in paragraph 182 would suggest. How much less it will be impossible to say until the results of the inquiry into "particular instance" papers are known, and there has been some experience of the amount of papers transferred to the Public Record Office as a result of the new reviewing procedure. But at best the resultant figure will continue to be large. It must not be forgotten that papers which are preserved will require not merely accommodation but also attention to see that they remain in good condition. We have referred in paragraph 28 above to the existing position in which it has proved impossible to keep all the medieval records in a proper state of repair. Records which are "too decayed to be handled except by way of repair" are of little value to anybody. In planning future accommodation, therefore, it is essential to bear in mind that the provision of racking for any particular group of records today will almost assuredly entail the undertaking of repair work some time tomorrow. It is thus important to make sure that the claims of valuable material to proper care, and where necessary repair, are not made impossible to meet because of the need to deal with equal claims in respect of other material which could more reasonably have been destroyed.

#### **Housing the Public Records**

186. The responsibility for housing all the public records at present rests on the Public Record Department, which administers the Public Record Office for this purpose. Because of the ever increasing bulk of the public records, and the expense of finding additional accommodation for them in London,\* it has been suggested that the policy of housing them in one central group of repositories should be abandoned, and a policy of decentralisation substituted for it. Three alternative proposals have been submitted to us.

187. The first proposal is that a number of separate Record Offices, each containing the records of a group of Departments, should be established

\* The Ministry of Works has estimated that to erect a new building in central London with facilities similar to those existing at Chancery Lane would cost up to £1,250,000. Such a building would be simpler than that existing at Chancery Lane, though not lacking in dignity. To erect a building similar in style to the existing Public Record Office building might cost up to £1,500,000.

either in provincial towns or in places within easy reach of London. If these offices were located in University towns it has been suggested that this would facilitate the research work done by students at those Universities, though admittedly only in a limited range of subjects. To this proposal there are a number of objections. It would add greatly to the difficulties of any research worker whose studies covered the work of a number of Departments, unless the records he wished to see happened all to be housed in the same Office. Difficulties would arise, too, when work was transferred from one Department to another. Thus such changes as the transfer of the Factory Department from the Home Office to the Ministry of Labour and National Service, or the extensive reorganisation that took place on the setting up of the Ministry of Local Government and Planning,\* might mean either that records would have to be moved from one Office to another or that the records of one Department were to be found in a number of different Record Offices. The advantages of this proposal are so slight in comparison with these and other disadvantages which it would entail that we consider it does not merit serious consideration.

188. The second proposal is that some of the Universities, or other academic institutions, should assume the responsibility for housing certain classes of records. Such an arrangement would mean a departure from what has, rightly or wrongly, developed into an archival principle in England that public records must not pass out of official custody if their authenticity is to remain unchallenged. Since so large a part of the Universities' expenditure is already financed out of public funds, a proposal for transferring responsibility for housing records from the Public Record Department to the Universities would not necessarily result in any reduction in the charge falling on the Exchequer. Moreover, in view of the accommodation difficulties with which most Universities are now faced (accentuated, in the case of Cambridge and Oxford, by the need to find accommodation to house copies of books which they are entitled by law to receive), it is doubtful whether many of them would favour undertaking the responsibility for the custody of a group of records whose potential usefulness to them would of necessity be limited.

189. The third proposal is that some, if not all, of the Departments should permanently keep their own records. The Royal Commission of 1910 listed a small number of Departments that wished to retain their records in their own custody, and their views do not appear to have changed materially since then. The Post Office, for example, maintains that it has constant recourse to papers of a hundred and more years ago, and points to the advantage to the student in having all the Post Office records available in one place. The Ministry of Education has adduced similar arguments, adding that as its library comprises the most important collection of books and papers on educational matters in the country, the Ministry is the point to which teachers and those doing research into the history and theory of education are increasingly attracted in pursuing their studies. There is force in these arguments, though we think that their importance can be over-estimated. Whatever arrangements are made for housing Departmental records will be bound to have disadvantages for somebody; if a Department retains its own records this will assist those students who wish to refer to records relating to that Department alone, but be a hindrance to those who wish to consult the records of other Departments as well. Moreover, though such an arrangement would reduce the pressure of space on the Public Record Office itself, it would not reduce the total amount of space required, nor necessarily the cost of providing it. We consider too that there is a danger that if Departments are permitted to retain their own records they will allow their

\* Now the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

reviewing work to fall into arrear. We have quoted, in paragraph 184 above, one example where this has happened.

190. A more particular argument in support of a Department continuing to retain its own records has been advanced by the Board of Customs and Excise. The Board has drawn attention to the fact that before 1823 there were separate Boards of Customs and of Excise for England and Scotland, and a Board of Revenue for Ireland. It has therefore suggested that if the Board's records had been transferred, they would doubtless have had to go partly to London, partly to Edinburgh, and partly to Dublin (or Belfast, or both). This argument rests on a misunderstanding of the present law. All these records are under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls. The Master of the Rolls is empowered (but not required) to authorise the transfer of any of them relating exclusively or mainly to Scotland to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland; he is empowered to authorise the transfer to Belfast only of records which are not of sufficient value to justify their preservation in the Public Record Office; and he is not empowered to authorise the transfer to Dublin of any records at all.

191. We consider that, despite their increasing bulk, to decentralise the arrangements for the storage of records would raise more problems than it would solve. We are therefore of the opinion that the present principle (though it is hardly the present practice) of transferring all Departmental records to one central repository or group of repositories under unified control should be continued. It may be that in individual cases it would be advantageous for a Department to remain responsible for storing its own records, and under such circumstances we should not rule out its being allowed to do so. But we recommend that the discretion in this matter should rest with the Public Record Department, and, in particular, that the Public Record Department should be the sole judge of what particular arrangements best met the needs of research workers. It would be necessary for any Department which was granted permission to retain its own records to supply the Public Record Department with up-to-date lists of them.

#### **Public Record Office**

192. However drastically the bulk of present-day records may be reduced, it is clear that, even to house those existing papers which it may be decided to preserve, the Public Record Office will require more accommodation than can be provided in the present buildings at Chancery Lane and Ashridge Park. Moreover, if our recommendations concerning the disposal of existing papers are accepted, it will require this additional space quickly.

193. The arrangements which we have suggested for the disposal of existing papers prior to the introduction of the new reviewing procedure should result in, not only an increase in the number of papers transferred to the Public Record Office, but also a much larger decrease in the amount of space required by Departments, either at Hayes or on their own premises, to house their own records. A reduction in the quantity of papers stored on Departmental premises should free accommodation in the Departments themselves for housing records which are at present stored at Hayes. With only 250,000 feet, out of a potential accommodation of 800,000 feet, at present occupied at Hayes, and 50,000 feet, out of a potential 178,000 feet occupied at Ashridge Park, there should be no difficulty in providing, either at Ashridge Park or at Hayes, sufficient accommodation to house all the records likely to be transferred to the Public Record Office during the

transitional period. This could be done without prejudice to any decision that might be taken concerning the ultimate use of the accommodation at Hayes.

194. The additional permanent accommodation required by the Public Record Office could be provided by increasing the amount of accommodation available at Chancery Lane: by adding to the number of, or space available in, branch repositories outside London; or by a combination of both.

195. From the point of view of the research worker, it is desirable that the maximum possible number of records should be stored in London, and that adequate facilities should be available for consulting them. The main advantages of the Chancery Lane site are the fact that accommodation for 150,000 feet of records is already in existence there, and (so far as legal records are concerned) its close proximity to the Courts. The Crown owns land adjoining the Public Record Office buildings in Chancery Lane which could be used for an extension to the existing buildings. We are informed that plans for providing such an extension have been considered from time to time, but have had to be postponed because of the economic stringency. The Ministry of Works has informed us that if the extra accommodation made available in this way were used exclusively to house records it should be possible to accommodate an extra 130,000 feet of them. The cost of doing so would be about £900,000.

196. The advantage of providing storage accommodation outside London is that it is cheaper than building in London itself. The Ministry of Works has estimated that to provide a new repository outside London with 100,000 feet of racking would cost between £300,000 and £350,000—a reduction of from £550,000 to £600,000 on the amount it would cost to provide similar accommodation at Chancery Lane.\* The main disadvantage of building outside London is that either records have to be brought in to a central consulting point as required, or students have to go outside London in order to examine them. Both involve the research worker in some inconvenience.

197. Thus the advantages of providing additional accommodation in London have to be set against the reduction in costs obtained by building elsewhere. We consider that the balance of advantage would lie in exploiting the Chancery Lane site to its maximum extent, as a repository and a place where records may be consulted, and in providing the remaining storage accommodation required outside, but within easy reach of, London. At present, records deposited at Ashridge Park to which research workers or Government Departments wish to refer are brought up to Chancery Lane by a van which provides a daily service between the two places. We believe that the delay which must of necessity ensue from this arrangement is likely to cause less inconvenience to the research worker than a requirement that he should himself go to the branch repository in order to consult the records there. If his work is extensive it is unlikely that all the records he will wish to consult will be housed in the one repository, and we consider it preferable that the records should be brought to him rather than that he should be obliged to go to them. We understand from the Deputy Keeper of the Records that documents need suffer no damage in transit.

198. We consider that the increased cost involved in providing additional accommodation at Chancery Lane to the extent we have suggested in the previous paragraph would be justified by the advantages to the research

\* One minor advantage of a country repository, such as that at Ashridge Park, is that it is easier to keep papers clean there than at a repository in or near London.

worker which it would entail. Whether it would be justified under present economic circumstances raises issues of social and economic priorities which it would be outside our competence to pronounce upon. We would, however, draw attention to the need to provide extra accommodation at Chancery Lane for consulting the records. The present search rooms are inadequate, and we recommend that if it is not possible in the immediate future to exploit the whole of the available site, high priority should be given to the provision of extra search room accommodation—if necessary by adapting the existing premises. This would reduce, but unavoidably so, the amount of space that would be available at Chancery Lane for storing the records themselves.

199. It is desirable that the number of outlying repositories should be as small as possible: one large repository creates fewer problems of management than a number of small ones. The repository at Ashridge Park consists of 31 single storey huts which were erected in 1940 for use as a hospital. In 1951 a start was made on the work of adapting these huts to contain records, including the installation of central heating and the provision of racking. The Ministry of Works considers that the huts will have a further useful life of some thirty years, and the buildings and site have accordingly been taken on lease until 1984. The Deputy Keeper of the Records has stated that he considers these buildings to be well suited for use as a repository, and that he would welcome the erection of additional buildings of a similar type, for which there is room on the site. The Ministry of Works has informed us, however, that to build additional single storey buildings of the type now at Ashridge Park would cost about two-thirds more again than to provide a similar amount of accommodation in a multi-storey building designed specially for the housing of records. In view of this, and of the relatively short life of the Ashridge Park site on the existing lease, we consider that when it becomes necessary to provide further outlying repository accommodation for the Public Record Office this should take the form of a building designed for the purpose; and that as standards of accommodation for housing records are unlikely to change over the years, both building and site should have as long a life as possible.

200. But before any new building work is undertaken we think it desirable to give serious consideration to the possibilities of using the "Limbo" accommodation at Hayes as an outlying repository for the Public Record Office. This accommodation, which is Crown property, consists of two large buildings which were formerly used as a Royal Ordnance Factory. The adaptation of one of these buildings as a repository for records was begun in 1950, and when work on both buildings is complete it is estimated, as we have stated, that accommodation will be available for some 800,000 feet of records. As we have explained in paragraph 49 above, the purpose of providing the repository at Hayes was to make available high-class accommodation for housing the non-current records of Departments, and so to release other accommodation in London and elsewhere. As a result it has proved possible for the Government to give up a number of buildings which were previously being used to store records, and savings in rent have ensued. Whether it will continue to be profitable to pursue a policy of transferring non-current records from Departmental premises to the "Limbo" repository at Hayes is more doubtful. Much of the accommodation at present being used for housing non-current records in Departments consists of racking or cupboards in corridors or basements which, though satisfactory for this particular purpose, could not be used as office accommodation. To remove records stored under these conditions to Hayes might add to, rather than lessen, the cost of maintaining them.

201. The biggest disadvantage of a "Limbo" repository scheme lies in the incentive it gives to Departments to defer the reviewing of their records. We believe that the existence of the repository at Hayes has already had this effect. Indeed we should rank the existence of an oversufficiency of accommodation in which to house their papers as one of the most important causes of Departments having allowed their reviewing work to fall into arrear. Even in those Departments which have pleaded shortage of staff as a reason for their failure to keep up to date with their reviewing work, we believe that as often as not the real cause has been a more than adequate supply of storage space. We consider it to be no bad thing that Departments generally should be under some sort of pressure concerning the amount of space at their disposal for the storage of their non-current records.

202. This does not mean that there will be no need for a "Limbo" repository in future; Departments will require space for housing their records, and whether it will be preferable to provide this on their own premises or in a "Limbo" repository will depend on the circumstances of each particular case. Nor are we in a position to judge what will be the effect on the storage requirements of individual Departments of our recommendation that those papers not destroyed at the First Review should be retained for a total period of 25 years. But we suggest that the demands of Departments for accommodation in a "Limbo" repository should be scrutinised with care, and granted only if the effect of providing the accommodation will be to reduce the costs of storage (or increase the standard of accommodation where this is considered necessary), and not merely to enable reviewing work to be postponed.

203. The continued use of the accommodation at Hayes as a "Limbo" repository should still leave a large amount of storage space available there for the storage of records which have been transferred to the Public Record Office. If it were considered desirable on administrative grounds to segregate the accommodation which was being used for the permanent storage of records from that used as a "Limbo" repository this could be done; the need to build internal fire-break walls has had the effect of dividing the one building that has so far been adapted into eight separate sections, and this should facilitate any segregation which may be considered necessary. The repository at Hayes would share with that at Ashridge Park the disadvantage of having its office accommodation in a separate building from the buildings being used for the storage of records, but the inconveniences which this would entail are small. The site at Hayes is much closer to the centre of London than is Ashridge Park, and though this would mean a reduction in security in the event of war, it would reduce the expense of transporting records to and from Chancery Lane—an expense which could be still further reduced by combining this service with that for transporting records to and from the "Limbo" repository. As at Ashridge Park, arrangements for security patrols to ensure the safety of the records are already in force at Hayes.

204. We therefore recommend that the outlying repository accommodation required by the Public Record Department should be provided in the existing buildings at Ashridge Park and at Hayes. The records in these two repositories which have been opened to the public should be made available for inspection, when required, at Chancery Lane. Whether it would be desirable to provide supplementary search room facilities at Ashridge Park or at Hayes would depend on whether the number of research workers who would find it more convenient to consult the records there than have them brought to Chancery Lane was sufficient to justify the expense involved. This is a matter on which there is as yet hardly sufficient experience to

judge. The decision as to whether such ancillary services as the repair of records and photographic work should be carried out at the outlying repositories or concentrated at Chancery Lane raises no issues of principle, and should be taken in the light of whatever arrangement is thought to be the most economical and administratively convenient.

205. The accommodation at Chancery Lane, Ashridge Park, and Hayes should prove ample for the storage of records for many years to come. By the time the need arises for further accommodation the new reviewing procedure should have been fully in operation for some years, and the Public Record Department and the Ministry of Works should by then be able to judge with fair accuracy the amount of additional space that will be required each year. This should enable the provision of additional accommodation to be planned in advance—a state of affairs which has never been possible before. It would be unwise to make provision for too far ahead, for no one at this stage can say what new form of records (such as tape or wire recordings) may be developed in the future, or what their effect will be on the amount of space required. But we consider that the general effect of the implementation of our recommendations should be to put an end, once and for all, to those recurrent accommodation crises which have been a feature of the administration of the public records ever since the first Public Record Office Act was passed in 1838.

#### **PART IV—FILMS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND SOUND RECORDINGS**

##### **Films etc. As Records**

206. In 1945 the then Master of the Rolls gave it as his opinion that “all cinematograph film, still photographs and sound recordings (whether or not associated with cinematograph film) made by or on behalf of a Government Department, and preserved by that Department for reference, must be considered to have the status of Public Records in the same way as written papers”. These have accordingly been treated as coming within the scope of the Public Record Office Acts, and a number of Schedules permitting the destruction of material which is not of sufficient public value to justify its preservation in the Public Record Office have been made. The legal position is not without obscurity, and we note that the Destruction Schedules which have so far been made describe themselves as relating to films, photographs, and sound recordings which have been preserved for reference “or other official use”. This is not, however, a subject which we need pursue further in view of our recommendation that the Public Record Office Acts should be repealed. It is, nevertheless, necessary for us, in order to interpret our terms of reference, to determine whether films, photographs and sound recordings are “records”; or, rather, since this is an empirical and not a metaphysical question, whether it is desirable to make in respect of Departmental films, photographs, and sound recordings, the same sort of arrangements as we have proposed for the preservation of Departmental papers. The question poses the greatest problems in relation to films.

207. Enquiries which we have made have shown that many, perhaps most, of the films held by Departments have been produced for exhibition to the public, as part of the information and public relations services of the Government. Other films have been made to provide information for more specialised audiences, such as technical films held by the Ministry of Works and loaned to firms in the building industry. One film has been made as a visual appendix to a Working Party Report. Both the Imperial War

Museum and the Air Ministry have large collections of films classified as "Battle Records". The majority of the remaining films have been made for training persons in the service of the Crown.

208. The affinity between a film made for exhibition to the public and a file containing Departmental correspondence and minutes is clearly not very great. Such a film is more closely akin to a book, or other published material which is put on sale to the public. But there are other films which it is much more difficult to categorise. It is, for example, very difficult to say whether films for training official staffs are more akin to Departmental papers or to text-books. But even in the case of those films which are more analogous to books than to Departmental papers there is an important distinction to be made. Copies of books and other published written matter are preserved in the British Museum Library and in the libraries of the privileged Universities. Official films, on the other hand, are not likely to be preserved unless special provision is made for them. Whether all films are "records" in the strict sense of the term as we have defined it in paragraph 1 of this Report is therefore of little practical importance. Some of them undoubtedly are; but what is important is that none of them, whether "records" or not, are likely to be preserved unless special arrangements are made to see that they are. We feel, therefore, that we shall not be straying unduly from our terms of reference if we consider the arrangements for the preservation of Government films, photographs, and sound recordings as a whole.

#### Photographs

209. Of these three classes of material, still photographs (i.e. photographs of a pictorial nature) present the least difficulties. They are in form the most closely related to written papers and can be stored under the same conditions. The number of photographs preserved at the Public Record Office at present is not large, and the number which it would be desirable to preserve as public records would probably be small at any time. We recommend that the decision as to which photographs are to be preserved permanently should be taken by the Departments concerned, in consultation with the Inspecting Officers, and that these should be preserved in the Public Record Office.

#### Sound Recordings

210. Sound recordings not associated with cinematograph film are little used by Departments today, except for such ephemeral purposes as dictation for subsequent transcription, or the training of staff. The Ministry of Civil Aviation has in its possession recordings of radio conversations between air and ground made during the take-off and landing of aircraft. These are kept for thirty days, except where they relate to investigated accidents in which case they are retained for six years. Two Departments have recordings of Ministers' speeches.

211. The importance of sound recordings, from the point of view of the preservation of records, lies more in the possibility that in the future they may supersede written documents for some purposes. An indication of possible developments is the installation by one Department of two machines for recording dictations which will only be transcribed if the need arises. It was because of the possibility of developments along these lines that we recommended, in paragraph 205 above, that additional accommodation for storing records should not be provided for too far ahead. Should sound recordings be developed to the stage at which they supersede written documents in some cases, it will be desirable that the same canons of

selection should apply to them. It is also clear that records of this type which it may be decided to preserve will have to be made available to members of the public at the same place as traditional records. We therefore recommend that the Public Record Department should watch developments in this field, with a view to making the appropriate technical arrangements for the preservation of sound recordings in the Public Record Office, should this prove to be necessary.

## **Films**

### *Physical Characteristics*

212. Films create much greater problems, and must be considered in more detail. Cinematograph film consists of a cellulose support or "base", coated on one side with an emulsion which carries the photographic image. We are informed that from the point of view of preservation both the base and the emulsion create problems.

213. Two types of base have been used so far, namely cellulose nitrate and cellulose acetate. Cellulose nitrate ("celluloid") has the advantages of strength, plasticity, and cheapness, but is very unstable. From the time of its manufacture it begins to decompose, and gases are given off from it, which, if allowed to accumulate, combine with the emulsion and destroy the image. Films in this state are also liable to spontaneous combustion. Cellulose nitrate film requires storage conditions which give a cool even temperature and suitable humidity, and permit the decomposition gases to escape. It is also desirable that films should be subjected to periodic chemical tests to check their condition since the progress of disintegration is not visible. Cellulose acetate ("safety film") is much more stable and is not highly inflammable. Since 1951 it has therefore generally superseded cellulose nitrate as a film base. It is liable to become brittle, though this can apparently be overcome if it is suitably conditioned and sealed before being put away. No one can say with accuracy what will be the useful life of this type of film, though it is claimed that artificial ageing tests have shown that it will be comparable to that of good quality rag paper.

214. Provided it is properly processed, the emulsion (considered apart from its cellulose base), appears to be relatively permanent. It is, however, highly susceptible to scratching. When run through film projectors or printers, all film, positive or negative, is liable to be scratched on both cellulose and emulsion surfaces. This means that the number of good prints that can be obtained from a single negative, and the number of times that a positive print can be projected are both strictly limited. It is therefore the usual practice to minimise the use of an original negative by first printing from it one or more fine-grain or lavender positive prints, designed, not for projection, but for the making of further duplicate negatives. This extends greatly the possible life of a film since many duplicate negatives can be made from one such print, with the result that the number of projection prints it is possible to make is multiplied many times.

### *Present Arrangements*

215. Figures supplied to us by Departments show that eighteen of them have films in their possession to a total of about 40,000,000 feet.\* Of this

\* These figures relate only to master material; i.e., each film is counted only once, and the actual amount of film held by Departments may be greatly in excess of the figures quoted. A "film" foot must not of course be confused with the "linear" foot used for measuring quantities of papers.

about 32,500,000 feet is on nitrate base, and 7,500,000 feet on acetate base. We would not claim any great accuracy for these figures, which must to a large extent represent estimates rather than actual measurements. Some Departments, especially those with large holdings, have had difficulty in calculating the quantity of film held by them; one Department, for example, has stated that its holdings include 1,125,000 feet of 16 mm. film, but whether this is sound or silent it has been unable to say. Similar difficulties have been experienced in determining the subject matter of some of the films held.

216. Most of these films are stored under arrangements for which Departments are themselves responsible, but some are stored in commercially owned vaults, and some in commercial laboratories. A small amount is stored by one of the Universities. The extent to which films, and especially nitrate based films, are stored in accommodation specially adapted for them varies considerably. The practice of testing films to guard against deterioration is restricted to four Departments.

217. The Ministry of Works has informed us that it is aware that some of the accommodation which is at present being used for the storage of films is unsatisfactory. The Ministry rents some vaults from the British Film Institute, but the number of these has recently had to be reduced because the Institute has needed additional accommodation in which to store its own films. Proposals have been made for the erection of a central film store at Hayes, but consideration of these has had to be deferred because of the restrictions placed on capital investment.

218. Six Departments have Schedules authorising the disposal of films. These state that "disposal will generally be by destruction, but scheduled documents which the Imperial War Museum, the British Film Institute, or the Royal Society\* may wish to acquire may be transferred to these bodies". The Schedules authorise the immediate disposal of films "which have so deteriorated as to be unfit for retention as records", discarded film cuts, and films "rejected as imperfect or unsatisfactory"; the disposal after a short period of duplicates; and the disposal "when no longer of material value" of films "which are no longer required for the purposes of the Ministry, and which are of insufficient scientific, historical or other value to justify their permanent retention as Public Records". It will thus be seen that the decision as to what is to be retained and what destroyed is left entirely to Departments themselves.

219. So far no arrangements have been made for the storage of those films which it has been decided to preserve permanently, the Public Record Department having informed Departments that it is unable to take charge of these records until special accommodation has been provided for them.

#### *Permanent Preservation*

220. In considering the arrangements to be made for the permanent preservation of Government films it is necessary to note the position of the British Film Institute. The Institute was created in 1933 to encourage the use and development of the film as a means of entertainment and instruction. It was at first financed partly by the subscriptions of its members and partly by a grant from the Cinematograph Fund established under the Sunday Entertainment Act, 1932. In 1947 a Committee of Inquiry into the future of the Institute was appointed by the Lord President

\* The Royal Society is included to enable it to receive copies of photographs. It does not maintain a collection of films.

of the Council under the chairmanship of Sir Cyril (now Lord) Radcliffe. As a result of the Committee's recommendations some changes have been made in the Institute's organisation and work, and a substantial contribution to its finances is made by the Government. The Governors of the Institute are now all appointed by the Lord President of the Council.

221. One of the objects of the Institute as originally set out in its Memorandum of Association is "to be responsible for film records, and to maintain a national repository of films of permanent value". In 1935 the Institute accordingly established the National Film Library, which now contains over 7,000 films selected for their value either as art or for purposes of scientific or historical study. Approved individual students may examine preservation copies of these films on a table-viewing machine which causes the minimum of wear and tear. For more extensive viewing duplicate copies are made, and a number of these have been placed in a lending section of the Library for hire to schools, film societies, and other educational organisations. Duplicate copies have also been shown at the British Film Institute's National Film Theatre. The importance of the National Film Library was affirmed by the Radcliffe Committee, which recommended that its administration should be one of the main executive functions of the Institute.

222. The existence of an organisation which was established with official encouragement to be a "national repository of films of permanent value" inevitably raises the question whether it is necessary for the Government to be at the expense of maintaining a parallel organisation for the preservation of its own films. This is the more so since, apart from engaging in certain non profit-making trading activities, the British Film Institute is wholly supported by grants in aid from official sources. Film storage requires special buildings and apparatus and a suitably qualified staff, none of which is at present possessed by the Public Record Department. The British Film Institute, on the other hand, has great experience in this kind of work. The Office of the Lord President of the Council—which is the Department under whose aegis the Institute comes—has informed us that the standards of preservation of the National Film Library are now recognised throughout the world as pre-eminent, and that there is no doubt that the Institute would preserve film archives under conditions which could not be bettered elsewhere.

223. There are three main arguments against entrusting the preservation of Government films to the National Film Library.

224. The first objection is that the British Film Institute is not an official organisation, so that to entrust it with the care of Government films would be to offend against what in paragraph 188 above we have described as "an archival principle in England" that public records must not pass out of official custody if their authenticity is to remain unchallenged. We have referred to this principle as English, because this country has in general not followed the continental practice of regaining possession by purchase of those official records which have for any reason passed out of official hands. The principle springs from legal practice. The Public Record Office Act of 1838 provides that a certified copy of any record in the custody of the Master of the Rolls shall be received in court as evidence in every case in which the original record could have been so received. It is the practice of the courts to accept the original record, of which the document produced is a copy, for what it purports to be without the need for any further evidence as to its

authenticity.\* But though legal in origin the principle has a wider application as a defence against forgery, for a record which has remained in the custody of those who originated it or their successors may be regarded as *prima facie* genuine, whereas one which has passed out of custody may have been altered or be wholly false. It is on these grounds that it has been said that "Archive quality is dependent upon the possibility of proving an unblemished line of responsible custodians"<sup>49</sup>.

225. However important the principle of official custody may be in relation to traditional documents, there are two reasons which lead us to consider that it has little relevance to films. In the first place, most of these have already been out of official custody on at least one occasion. Most Government films are processed by commercial firms and, as we have shown, some films are at present stored in commercial vaults or laboratories. In the second place, the possibility that the authenticity of a film may be called in question, whether in court or elsewhere, is hardly a real enough danger to justify the taking of special measures to prevent it. It is, in any event, one of the express purposes of the British Film Institute's existence to ensure that films are preserved properly, and the fact that the Institute is not an official organisation, in the sense that a Government Department is official, need not in our view prevent it from being entitled to be called a "responsible" custodian.

226. The second objection that has been raised to the entrusting of Government films to the British Institute is that if these films were stored elsewhere than in the Public Record Office they would lose their identity as part of the archives of the state. It has been English practice to centralise the national archives to a much greater extent than continental countries have done, but this is fundamentally a matter of convenience rather than of principle. Copies of Government publications are not in general preserved in the Public Record Office, and the research worker who wished to consult them would naturally turn to the Library of the British Museum.<sup>†</sup> There is no reason in principle why the student who wished to consult a film should not do so at the National Film Library, and in many cases it would be more convenient for him to do so. A film like "Night Mail", for example, is more likely to be sought after by students of documentary film than by researchers into the history of the Post Office, and such students would find the bulk of their other material in the National Film Library.

227. The third objection relates to the objects and activities of the British Film Institute itself, and is set out, very briefly, in the Report of the Radcliffe Committee. The Committee said it had been suggested to it "that the Institute should undertake the preservation of films on behalf of the Public Record Office, [and] of other Government Departments". The Committee rejected the suggestion, stating that, "Apart from the constitutional and administrative difficulties in the way of preserving films on behalf of the Public Record Office, we would not wish to add to the Institute's responsibilities an executive task of this sort not directly contributing to its essential purposes"<sup>50</sup>. With the repeal of the Public Record Office Acts the "constitu-

\* A modern authority has commented, "This legal doctrine in common with others, has not much historical basis in fact. For centuries the national archives were mainly left to rot in damp cellars or attics, 'in safe custody' in no other sense than that they were regarded as useless lumber". V. H. Galbraith: *An Introduction to the Use of the Public Records* (Oxford 1952) p. 12. Professor Galbraith criticizes the principle as having in practice done more harm than good.

† Her Majesty's Stationery Office has informed us that though it retains a set of Stationery Office publications for its own purposes preservation for posterity is achieved by depositing copies of official publications with the British Museum and the other privileged libraries.

tional and administrative difficulties" to which the Radcliffe Committee referred would disappear. The preservation in the National Film Library of those Government films which it was decided to preserve permanently might result in the Library having to hold some films which it would not otherwise have wished to retain. But the number of such films would probably be small, and the presence in the National Film Library of Government films in general should add greatly to its usefulness and value. The implementation of the recommendations of the Radcliffe Committee has resulted in a considerable strengthening of the British Film Institute since 1948, and we consider that arguments which might have applied then are not necessarily relevant now.

228. We therefore recommend that, subject to the reservation in paragraph 236 below, the British Film Institute should act, on suitable terms, as the Government's agent for the permanent preservation of its films, and that all Government films which it is intended to preserve should be kept in the National Film Library. In carrying out these obligations we recommend that the British Film Institute should act as the agent of the Public Record Department, which should be responsible for the arrangements to be made with the Institute. We recommend that the copyright in Government films should remain vested, as now, in the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, though it would doubtless be found convenient for the Controller to come to some arrangement with the Public Record Department concerning the use to be made by the National Film Library of Government films in its charge. (This would accord with present practice under which the National Film Library has no rights in the films it is preserving, none of which can be made available for any form of exhibition without the consent of the copyright owners, for so long as copyright subsists.) It would be necessary to stipulate that Departments should not hand over secret or other security classified films to the National Film Library until the security classification had ceased to apply.

#### *Storage whilst in Departmental use*

229. The arrangements which we have proposed in the preceding paragraphs for the permanent preservation of films will be of little value unless the films have been properly stored while they are in the hands of Departments. There is clearly no point in providing facilities for the permanent preservation of films if, through faulty storage conditions or normal use, the copies to be preserved have so deteriorated as to be unusable. Such a situation has been aptly compared with that which would obtain if the British Museum or University Libraries were to be given, not new copies of books on publication, but old stock copies, already yellowing and worn, long after the books had gone out of print. The position would in fact be worse than this, for a worn book can be read, or if necessary reprinted, whereas a film of which no good copy exists can never be reproduced again in its original form.

230. We have explained in paragraph 214 above that it is the normal practice when a film is made to make from it a special positive print from which further negatives can be made. This positive print and the original negative are then left unused. For so long as the film is in use either or both of these copies ought to be kept in good condition in case it is necessary to produce further prints for projection purposes. In order, therefore, to ensure that an adequate copy of a film is available for preservation it is necessary only to make sure that one or other of these prints is properly looked after while the film is in actual use. To do this is desirable in the interests, not

...y of posterity, but of those who are to make current use of the film ; for a film which has deteriorated badly cannot be used for any purpose, and a film which is uncatalogued or of which no-one knows whether it is sound or silent is of no value to anyone. We therefore recommend that it should be made obligatory on Departments to ensure that a master copy of each of their films is stored under proper conditions from the day on which it is taken into their charge.

ap 231. Our enquiries have shown that this is not at present being done. The extent of the arrangements which will need to be made for the storage of films while they are in Departmental use will depend on the amount of suitable accommodation already available, and the quantity of film that has to be stored. At present some Departments hold large quantities of film which are no longer required for current purposes, but whose ultimate disposal has not yet been considered. The storage of film under adequate conditions is expensive, and it is therefore important that accommodation should not be provided for storing master copies of films which have passed out of use, if it is not intended to preserve them permanently. The storage of film under inadequate conditions, on the other hand, is not only a waste of money, but may, in the case of film on nitrate base, be positively dangerous. We therefore recommend that, as a first essential, there should be a review of all existing films, and that those which are no longer required for Departmental purposes should be segregated from those which are. We shall discuss the disposal of this former group of films in paragraph 234 below.

232. Once this segregation of films has been completed it should be possible to estimate the amount of accommodation necessary to house master copies of films still in use by Departments, and to compare this with the amount of suitable accommodation already available. Only when this has been done will it be possible to determine what additional accommodation will be required, and the best method of providing it. We consider that in the interests of efficiency of management there would be much to be said for providing the additional accommodation required in the form of a central film store. Whether this should be combined with a store for the projection copies of films,\* or whether advantage should be taken of a proposal made to us by the British Film Institute that Departments which wished to do so should deposit master copies of their films with the National Film Library, are questions which can only be determined when the extent of the problem is known. We therefore make no recommendations on this point.

233. Films to be preserved in the National Film Library are at present selected by the British Film Institute. For this purpose the Institute has appointed three committees, each of which meets monthly : they are a committee consisting mainly of film critics to select films for their interest as film art and entertainment ; a committee of historians and subject experts to select films as records of contemporary history ; and a committee of scientists to select films of scientific value. Some Departments have requested, and received, assistance from these committees in deciding which of their films to preserve, and the Public Record Department has informed us that it would welcome the use of this machinery for the selection of films for preservation. We therefore recommend that the decision as to which Government films are to be preserved permanently should be taken by the British Film Institute's selection committees in consultation with the Inspecting Officers and the Department concerned.

\* The standards of accommodation for master (i.e., preservation) copies of films will be higher than those required for projection copies ; with these latter we are not concerned.

234. Decisions as to which films should be retained from among those now in the possession of Government Departments, but which are no longer required for Departmental purposes, should be taken as soon as possible after they have been segregated from the films still in use. A master copy of each film which it is intended to preserve should be handed over to the National Film Library and the remaining films destroyed. In addition to the intrinsic merit of their subject matter it will be necessary to take into account also the physical condition of the film prints, for it is likely that a number of them will be found to be in an unsatisfactory state. It hardly needs to be said that whenever a film is found to be in an unfit state to be preserved or reproduced it should be destroyed at once, without any expenditure of time and effort in deciding whether it would have been worth preserving if it had been in a better condition.

#### *Imperial War Museum*

235. The Imperial War Museum has in its possession some 6,000,000 feet of film, most of it on nitrate base, relating to the First and Second World Wars. The Museum has no facilities for showing these films, but copies are made available to Government Departments if required for training or other purposes. Copies are also made available, on payment of a fee, to film companies for research connected with, or for incorporation in, commercial films. Copies may also be seen by research students on a table-viewing model.

236. We can see no particular advantage in transferring this material to the National Film Library. Though of some general interest, these films are of more particular interest to students of the two World Wars, and such students would be accustomed to go to the Imperial War Museum in search of their material. We therefore recommend that the Imperial War Museum should continue to be responsible for those films already in its possession, and that it should also receive from other Departments any of their films within its sphere of interest which it may ultimately be decided to preserve. Whether the Museum should be provided with facilities for projecting copies of the films would depend on whether the demands of students to see them were sufficiently numerous to justify the expense involved. On this we do not feel competent to make any recommendation.

237. The Imperial War Museum's films are stored in converted Air Raid Shelters at Acton, and, to a lesser extent, in vaults hired from the British Film Institute. The climatic conditions in the Acton store are very good, and tests have shown that the films, some of which are 25 to 30 years old, have not been adversely affected by them. The main disadvantages of this accommodation are the high risk of fire due to overcrowding, and the inability to protect the buildings against the possibilities of petty pilfering.

238. The shelters at Acton are due to be demolished in the near future to clear the site for the building of houses, so that it will become necessary to provide alternative accommodation for the Museum's films. But before this is done we recommend that the films should be subjected to a thorough review, in order that unimportant material may be destroyed. It will then be possible to assess the amount of accommodation required to house the Museum's films. As the majority of these films are on nitrate base we consider it desirable that the number of those to be retained should be as small as possible. We recommend the continuance of the policy initiated in the nineteen thirties of reproducing on acetate based film any material which is considered worthy of preservation but for which reproduction has become necessary.

239. Once this review has been completed—but not before—we recommend that plans should be made for the provision of permanent accommodation for the Museum's films. The present accommodation at Acton is hardly be described as satisfactory, though it is probably a good deal better than that under which many Government films are at present stored. We recommend that the alternative accommodation to be provided when the shelters at Acton are destroyed should be designed, not only to provide suitable climatic conditions, but also to ensure the safe custody of the films, and minimise the risk of, and the effects of possible damage from, fire.

#### **PART V—SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

240. In framing our recommendations it has been our object to ensure that:—

(a) Departmental records which are worthy of permanent preservation are transferred regularly to the Public Record Office and there made available for the public to see;

(b) the Public Record Office is not swamped with valueless material; and

(c) the method of selecting records for preservation is administratively practicable.

We consider that the responsibility for the selection and transfer of records to the Public Record Office must rest on Departments themselves, but that the Public Record Department should be responsible for co-ordinating these arrangements and should supervise, on behalf of the Government as a whole, the way in which they are carried out by Departments.

241. The arguments which have led us to these conclusions are set out in the main body of the Report. Our main recommendations may be summarised as follows:—

##### **(1) Legislation**

1. The Public Record Office Acts, 1838 to 1898, should be repealed\*.

2. Legislation should be enacted to:—

(a) transfer the headship of the Public Record Department from the Master of the Rolls to a Minister of the Crown;

(b) authorise the destruction in accordance with the procedure outlined below of records which are not of sufficient public value to justify their preservation in the Public Record Office; and

(c) make provision for those recommendations specified below which require legal authority, or impose obligations on the Minister (e.g. to present a Report to Parliament and to appoint an Advisory Council).

##### **(2) Selection, Transfer, and Preservation of Records**

1.—(a) Departments should first review their records not later than five years after they have passed out of active use, and destroy those which they do not need to retain further for their own Departmental purposes (paragraphs 59 to 61);

(b) Except where experience shows that it would be uneconomical to do so, records not destroyed at the First Review should be reviewed again when they are 25 years old, and those considered to be of no further administrative or historical importance destroyed (paragraph 87).

\*These Acts cover some records which do not fall within our terms of reference, e.g. the records of the courts of law; the arrangements for the preservation of these will need to be carefully considered when the necessary legislation is drafted.

2. Departments should retain in their possession after 25 years only those records to which they need to have constant access, or whose further retention for a period is desirable on administrative but not historical grounds. All other records not destroyed should be transferred to the Public Record Office (paragraph 155).

3.—(a) Unless in respect of any particular group of records a Department instructs the Public Record Department to the contrary, all Departmental records in the Public Record Office should be opened to public inspection 50 years after their creation (paragraph 154);

(b) Permission should continue to be granted to individuals to examine records which are less than 50 years old whenever the Department concerned, after consultation with the Public Record Department, considers this to be unobjectionable (paragraph 154);

(c) The possibility of opening some classes of records to public inspection before the lapse of 50 years might be considered some five years after the introduction of the new reviewing procedure (paragraph 153).

4. The archivists in the Public Record Department should keep the records in the Public Record Office under continuous review, and, with the agreement of the Departments concerned, dispose of any whose further retention is not considered worthwhile (paragraph 140).

5. Subject to the approval of Her Majesty, Cabinet Office records should be transferred to the Public Record Office and opened to public inspection 50 years after their creation (paragraphs 147 and 155).

### (3) *Departmental Arrangements*

#### *A. Departments*

1.—(a) The responsibility for a Department's arrangements for the preservation of its records should, under the head of the Department, be vested in the Director of Establishments or an officer of equivalent status (paragraph 65);

(b) Each Department should appoint a Departmental Record Officer to be responsible under the Director of Establishments for the care of its papers from the time when they are created or first received in the Department until they are either destroyed or handed over to the Public Record Office (paragraph 67).

#### *B. Public Record Department*

1. (a) The headship of the Public Record Department should be transferred from the Master of the Rolls to a Minister of the Crown (paragraph 129);

(b) A new post should be established of official head of the Department with the title of Keeper of the Records (paragraph 142);

(c) A Records Administration Officer should be appointed to exercise an oversight of records before their transfer to the Public Record Office. His rank should be sufficient to enable him to hold his own with Directors of Establishments, and he should not be subordinate to the Deputy Keeper (paragraph 131);

(d) A small number of Inspecting Officers should be appointed under the Records Administration Officer to keep in touch with Departments and act as liaison officers on behalf of the Public Record Department. Each Inspecting Officer should be responsible for dealing with a group of Departments (paragraph 132);

(e) The Treasury should conduct an early enquiry into the organisation and staffing of the Public Record Department so as to determine its establishment (paragraph 141).

2. The Public Record Department should be responsible for co-ordinating the arrangements to be made by Departments for the selection and transfer of their records for permanent preservation (paragraph 130). The means of achieving this should include:—

(a) an oversight by the Inspecting Officers of the arrangements made by Departments for the conduct of the First Review (paragraph 133);

(b) the participation of the Inspecting Officers in Departments' Second Reviews (paragraph 136);

(c) the issue of a Guide for the information of Departmental Record Officers (paragraphs 137-9).

3. In the exercise of its responsibilities under 2 (b) above the Department should be assisted by a panel of advisers who should be available for consultation as required (paragraph 136).

4. The Minister in charge of the Department should be required to present an annual report to Parliament on the work of the Department (paragraph 143).

5. An Advisory Council, of which the Master of the Rolls should be invited to take the chair, should be appointed to advise the Minister on matters affecting the interests of users of the Public Record Office (paragraph 144).

#### (4) *Selection Procedure*

##### *A. First Review*

1. (a) The responsibility for deciding what records are to be retained at the First Review should rest on Departments themselves (paragraph 65);

(b) Subject to the direction of the Director of Establishments or his equivalent, the detailed exercise of this responsibility should rest on the Departmental Record Officer (paragraphs 65 and 68);

(c) The Inspecting Officers, on behalf of the Public Record Department, should satisfy themselves that reviewing work is being conducted promptly and properly by Departments (paragraph 135).

2. The Departmental Record Officer should draw up a list of unregistered papers, specifying what action is to be taken on each of them at the First Review (paragraph 72).

3. (a) Private Secretaries should work in close contact with Departmental Record Officers over the arrangements to be made for the disposal of their Ministers' papers (paragraph 75);

(b) The Public Record Department, in consultation with the Treasury and the other Departments, should draw up standard retention periods for files relating to members of the staff (paragraph 76).

4. (a) For registered papers the unit for purposes of review should be the file (paragraph 77);

(b) The reviewing procedure for registered files should be based on the way in which they are handled whilst in current use (paragraph 78);

(c) Files should be classified for purposes of review only if they are of a standard type whose general content will not vary from year to year. Such classification should coincide with that used for registering files when they are in current use. Files which cannot be classified should be reviewed

individually, either by files, or, where appropriate, by series of files (paragraph 84);

#### *B. Second Review*

1. (a) The decision as to what records are to be retained at the Second Review should be taken by Departments themselves, in conjunction with the Public Record Department (paragraph 87);

(b) The detailed exercise of this responsibility should rest on the Departmental Record Officer for the Department, and the appropriate Inspecting Officer (in consultation, where necessary, with the archivists) for the Public Record Department (paragraphs 87 and 136).

#### *C. "Particular Instance" Papers*

1. A Committee under the chairmanship of the Records Administration Officer should be appointed immediately to conduct a census of "particular instance" papers in the hands of Departments, and to decide which of them should be preserved (paragraphs 109 and 162);

2. Service records of the type discussed in paragraphs 148 to 152 relating to wartime should be preserved. The Public Record Department should discuss with the three Service Departments which of the Ships' Logs and Operations Record Books relating to peacetime should be preserved (paragraph 152);

3. The decision as to which "particular instance" papers created in future are to be retained should be taken by the Inspecting Officers sitting as a Committee, in consultation with the Departmental Record Officer and the archivists on the staff of the Public Record Department (paragraphs 110 and 134).

#### *(5) Transitional Arrangements*

1. The new procedure for reviewing records should be introduced at the end of a period not exceeding five years (paragraph 160);

2. The necessary legislation should be introduced as early as possible in that period (paragraph 160);

3. The posts of Records Administration Officer, Inspecting Officers, and Departmental Record Officers should be instituted immediately (paragraph 161);

4. Each Department, in conjunction with and with the agreement of the Inspecting Officer concerned, should draw up a programme for "working over" its existing records and introducing the new procedure (paragraph 162);

5. The "working over" of existing papers should be undertaken within the framework of the existing law. If a Department is unable to do this under the terms of its present Destruction Schedule, this should be replaced by a new Schedule (paragraph 167);

6. Parliament should be informed of the changes which it is intended to make in the methods of applying the existing law during the transitional period (paragraph 168).

#### *(6) Microphotography*

1. Microphotography does not provide a satisfactory means of reducing the bulk of present-day records, or a convenient form of preservation for the student, but the Public Record Department should keep technical developments in this field under constant review (paragraph 180).

*(7) Accommodation*

1. All Departmental records which are to be preserved permanently should be kept in the Public Record Office, unless the Public Record Department considers that in any particular case the public interest would be better served by allowing a Department to retain its own records (paragraph 191).

2. The site at Chancery Lane should be exploited to its maximum extent as a repository and a place where records may be consulted. The additional storage accommodation required should be provided at Ashridge Park and Hayes (paragraphs 193, 197, 204).

3. High priority in exploiting the site at Chancery Lane should be given to the provision of extra search room accommodation (paragraph 198).

*(8) Films, Photographs and Sound Recordings*

*A. Photographs*

1. Photographs for permanent preservation should be selected by the Department concerned, in consultation with the Inspecting Officers, and should be preserved in the Public Record Office (paragraph 209).

*B. Sound Recordings*

1. The Public Record Department should watch developments in this field so as to make arrangements for the preservation of sound recordings in the Public Record Office should this prove to be necessary (paragraph 211).

*C. Films*

1.—(a) Government films which are to be preserved permanently should be kept by the British Film Institute in the National Film Library. In this the British Film Institute should act, on suitable terms, as the agent of the Public Record Department (paragraph 228);

(b) All existing films should be reviewed, and those which are no longer required for Departmental purposes should be either destroyed or handed over to the National Film Library for permanent preservation (paragraphs 231, 234);

(c) Films for permanent preservation should be selected by the British Film Institute's selection committees, in consultation with the Inspecting Officers and the Department concerned (paragraph 233);

(d) It should be made obligatory on Departments to ensure that a master copy of each of their films is stored under proper conditions from the day on which it is taken into their charge (paragraph 230).

2.—(a) The Imperial War Museum should continue to be responsible for those films already in its possession, and should receive from other Departments any of their films within its sphere of interest which are to be preserved permanently (paragraph 236);

(b) Before permanent accommodation is provided for the Museum's films they should be subjected to a thorough review (paragraph 238);

(c) Besides providing suitable climatic conditions, the permanent accommodation should ensure the safe custody of the Museum's films, and minimise the risk of, and the effects of possible damage from, fire (paragraph 239).

242. Finally, we wish to place on record our warmest thanks to our Secretary, Mr. K. H. Clucas. His initiative, patience, resource, and tact have been failing. He has met every call that we have made upon him, and it is in no small degree due to him that we have found it possible to produce a unanimous report.

P. J. GRIGG (*Chairman*).

DENYS B. BUCKLEY.

S. P. CHAMBERS.

H. R. CRESWICK.

J. G. EDWARDS.

M. M. GOWING.

H. J. HABAKKUK.

K. H. CLUCAS (*Secretary*).

31st May, 1954.

## APPENDIX I

### Organisations Consulted

The following organisations have supplied information or expressed views to us, orally or in writing. The names of individual witnesses are not listed.

#### GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

Admiralty	Ministry of National Insurance†
Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries	National Maritime Museum
Air Ministry	National Parks Commission
British Museum	National Portrait Gallery
British Museum (Natural History)	National Savings Committee
Cabinet Office	Ordnance Survey Office
Central Land Board and War Damage Commission	Paymaster General's Office
Charity Commission	Ministry of Pensions†
Civil Service Commission	Post Office
Ministry of Civil Aviation*	Prison Commission
Colonial Office	Privy Council Office
Commissioners of Crown Lands	Department of Public Prosecutions
Commonwealth Relations Office	Public Record Department
Board of Customs and Excise	Public Trustee Office
Ministry of Defence	Public Works' Loan Board
Development Commission	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England)
Ministry of Education	Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire
Exchequer and Audit Department	Royal Mint
Export Credits Guarantee Department	Department of Scientific and Industrial Research
Ministry of Food	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
Foreign Office	Ministry of Supply
Foreign Office (German Section)	Tithe Redemption Commission
Forestry Commission	Board of Trade
Registrar of Friendly Societies	Ministry of Transport*
Ministry of Fuel and Power	Treasury
General Register Office	Treasury Solicitor
Government Actuary	War Office
Government Chemist	Welsh Board of Health
Ministry of Health	Ministry of Works
Home Office	
Ministry of Housing and Local Government	
Imperial War Museum	
Central Office of Information	
Board of Inland Revenue	
Ministry of Labour and National Service	
Land Registry	
Law Officers' Department	
Lord Chancellor's Department	
Office of the Lord President of the Council	
National Assistance Board	
National Debt Office	

#### FOREIGN MISSIONS

American Embassy†  
 Belgian Embassy  
 French Embassy  
 Italian Embassy  
 Royal Netherlands Embassy

#### OTHER ORGANISATIONS

British Film Institute  
 Royal Society  
 Society of Genealogists

\* Now the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation.

† Now the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance.

‡ In addition a number of organisations and individuals supplied information to Mr. Chambers and Professor Habakkuk in the course of their visit to the United States.

## APPENDIX II

### Modern Government Departments which have transferred Records to the Public Record Office

(Paragraph 52)

A. The following Departments have transferred to the Public Record Office the bulk of those of their records which they intend to preserve down to the dates shown:—

Admiralty ... ..	1902
Civil Service Commission ... ..	1938
Colonial Office ... ..	1935
Foreign Office ... ..	1920
Home Office ... ..	1880
Paymaster General's Office ... ..	1921
Board of Trade ... ..	1885
Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation ... ..	1919
Treasury ... ..	1914
War Office ... ..	1913

B. The following Departments have transferred to the Public Record Office a limited number only of the records which they intend to preserve. The dates shown are those of the latest record, or records, transferred. These may, however, refer to quite isolated classes, the bulk of the Department's preservable records from a much earlier date being still retained in the Department:—

Charity Commission ... ..	1944
Commonwealth Relations Office ... ..	1935
Commissioners of Crown Lands ... ..	1953
Board of Customs and Excise ... ..	1899
Ministry of Education ... ..	1902
Exchequer and Audit Department ... ..	1867
Forestry Commission ... ..	1949
Ministry of Health ... ..	1951
Board of Inland Revenue ... ..	1944
Ministry of Labour and National Service ... ..	1951
Duchy of Lancaster ... ..	1872
Law Officers' Department ... ..	1885
National Assistance Board ... ..	1949
National Debt Office ... ..	1888
National Insurance Audit Department ... ..	1938
Privy Council Office ... ..	1946
Privy Seal Office ... ..	1884
Ministry of Supply ... ..	1946
Treasury Solicitor ... ..	1921
Ministry of Works ... ..	1951

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3. Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XXXIV (1819), Columns 1464-5.
4. Ibid. Column 1460.
5. Ibid. Column 1459.
6. Thirty-third Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Records (1872), p. 11.
7. Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XXXIV (1819), Columns 1464-5.
8. Quoted in First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records, (1912) Vol. I (Part II) p. 1.

9. Report from the Select Committee on the Record Commission (1836) p. xxi.
10. Second Report of the Deputy Keeper (1841), pp. 2-3.
11. Ibid.
12. Eighth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1847), Appendix I, pp. 25-6.
13. Seventh Report of the Deputy Keeper (1846), Appendix II.
14. Letter of the Deputy Keeper, December 1851. Public Record Office (Secretary's Department) Letter Books, Vol. 15 (1851).
15. Eighth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1847), Appendix I, pp. 25-6.
16. Ninth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1848), p. 11.
17. Thirteenth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1852), p. 5.
18. Tenth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1849) Appendix I, p. 1.
19. Letter of the Deputy Keeper, December 1851. Public Record Office (Secretary's Department) Letter Books, Vol. 15 (1851).
20. Thirteenth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1852), p. 4.
21. 27th March, 1849. Public Record Office (Secretary's Department) Letter Books, Vol. 13 (1849).
22. Report from the Select Committee on the Record Commission (1836) p. xlii.
23. Second Report of the Deputy Keeper (1841), p. 76.
24. Tenth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1849), p. 4.
25. Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Public Record Office Bill (1877), Questions 264-269, 275.
26. Twentieth Report of the Deputy Keeper (1859), p. XXXII.
27. Twenty-third Report of the Deputy Keeper (1862), p. 33.
28. Return to an Order of the House of Commons of 1st August, 1876. House of Commons Paper 389 of 1876.
29. Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Public Record Office Bill (1877), Questions 27, 28.
30. Letter from the Master of the Rolls to the Secretary to the Treasury, dated 5th March, 1879, Treasury Papers No. 3622 of 1879.
31. Treasury Circular dated 7th April, 1880. Treasury Papers No. 21657 of 1879.
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33. Guide to the Public Records, Part I: Introductory (1950), pp. 27-8.
34. Sir Hilary Jenkinson: Manual of Archive Administration (Second Edition, 1937), p. 138.
35. Guide to the Public Records, Part I: Introductory (1950), p. 19.
36. Ibid., p. 38.
37. Jenkinson: op. cit., pp. 15-16 ; 149.
38. Report and Recommendations of the Committee on the American Historical Association on the Historian and the Federal Government, p. 3.
39. First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records (1912), Vol. I, (Part I), pp. 3-4.
40. Report from the Select Committee on the Record Commission (1836), p. xli.
41. Treasury Minute, 28th February, 1837. Treasury Minute Books, Vol. 336.
42. Letter from Lord John Russell to Lord Langdale, 9th March, 1837. Public Record Office General Correspondence, Vol. I.
43. Letter from Lord John Russell to Lord Langdale, 11th December, 1837. Ibid.
44. Letter from Lord Langdale to Lord John Russell, 12th December, 1837. Ibid.
45. Treasury Minute, 22nd May, 1838. Published as House of Commons Paper 639 of 1838.
46. First Report of the Royal Commission on Public Records (1912), Vol. I (Part I), p. 45.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Jenkinson: op. cit., p. 11.
50. Report of the Committee on the British Film Institute (1948; Cmd. 7361), para. 23.