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CHAPTER 1

Enforced silences

Simon Fowler

Introduction

Archival institutions are not neutral places. Nor are their archives neutral. Nor indeed is the subject of this book: what the archives do not have.

This may sound platitudinous: something a history student might write in an essay. This chapter, and the next, explore why this has long been the case in the context of traditional, one might say analogue, archives. In this chapter we will consider how archival institutions have traditionally failed to meet the needs of host communities and why there have been great gaps in the collections, and in archival collecting policies. In the words of the great French historian Marc Bloch, the records of a society are ‘witnesses in spite of themselves’ (Bloch, 1953, 51). That is, on the one hand the records become witnesses in the evidentiary sense arising from the process of record making and record keeping and, on the other, also bear witness to the lives of those who are the subjects of the records.

The historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015, 48, 52) suggests that archival institutions organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements. Their work of collection ‘is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility. They are the institutionalised sites of mediation between the socio-historical process and the narrative about that process.’

Sources and archives are neither neutral nor natural. They are created. It is this that is the reason for so many silences. Archival creation is, of course,

a human process, starting from individuals who produce the records, continuing through the selection process used by archivists and ending up with cataloguing and delivery of documents.

Indeed, archival institutions may literally impose silence on records. Users sit in reverential silence, often beneath notices asking them to be quiet, silently reading from documents. But some at least of the documents they read were meant to be read aloud or, in the case of history testimony, meant to be listened to. From the mid-16th century onwards, witness statements in English and Welsh legal cases were increasingly recorded in writing under oath before the trial. The documents produced in this way and which still survive came to replace the witnesses' live appearance in court during the trial. However, they were not produced in court as material objects; instead, they were returned to their oral point of origin by being read out by the court clerk and it was this reading aloud which constituted evidence, not the document which underwrote the clerk's performance. Till Geiger, Niamh Moore and Mike Savage echoed such sentiments from the perspective of contemporary sociology:

A key concern is that archived data has lost its context, or that even if some contextual information is provided, that this will not quite be enough, that in any case the transcript of an interview, with no matter how much metadata attached, will never have all its context, that a transcript is not an interview, and of course, indeed, it never can be. It is something else, perhaps an artefact of the research process. (Geiger, Moore and Savage, 2010, 21)

When we read Isabella Newport's statement to the London Commissary Court in 1492, we are reading the authentic voice of an angry woman half a millennium ago: 'I met Newport and had the hooreson by the face . . . and pushed him into the dyche . . . the bald hooreson Cokkold wer hangyed than he should be my husband' (Cox, 1993, 43), but while it is immediate and startling we have to read it silently in the reading room of an archival institution.

In discussing the recording of oral history, the South African archivist, Verne Harris (Harris, 1997, 139) made the point that it is not just the text, but also the act of reciting oral histories, which gives them their meaning and this recitation is linked to social situation, space, landscape, physical landmarks and items of material culture. In the very act of transcription

there is translation. What is written down may well not be exactly what was said. The pauses and the sighs may say as much, if not more, than the words themselves.

The power of the written

The existence of written archives exercises a power over what is the subject of academic discourse and even what is known more generally. People who lack a tradition of creating written records may find their history written by others or ignored altogether. The mounds at Cahokia, north-east of St Louis, are the site of North America's largest pre-Columbian city, dated between about 600 and 1350 CE, but its history has been forgotten because there are no written records or even oral memories; even its original name is not known. 'The earth and the mounds provide the only narrative. Visitors can interpret what they find in whatever way they like' (Bey, 2016).

Where oral traditions survive they can sometimes fill in for the lack of a written record. In West Africa, for example, Griot praise singers can recite the pedigrees of the rich families who employ them back 20 generations or more. In a world where writing was practically unknown the Griot guaranteed not only the survival of their people as a culturally and historically defined group, but also the social status of the nobles to whom they were attached (Hopkins, 1997, 46; Panzacchi, 1994, 182).

Even today, where the written word is ubiquitous, oral testimony can still play an important role, for example in countries where there are few archives (Bastian, 2003). More specifically, in uncovering the campaign against activists in South Africa during the apartheid regime Verne Harris concludes that: 'as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) unfolded the details of that campaign, it was oral rather than documentary evidence which carried the story. The archival record is but a sliver of social memory' (Harris, 2002, 64).

Groups, indeed whole societies, that operate outside a written culture do not produce archives in the conventional sense. Trouillot (2015, 90-2) discussed at length the European intellectual reaction to the Haitian Revolution of 1791 to 1804 that led to the creation of the first black-led state in the Americas. He describes how, although there are many records in France about the revolt, there were few texts setting out the views of the revolutionaries. This was partly because the idea of a slave revolt and a

black republic was totally new and outside European expectations, but also because most slaves were illiterate and the printed word was not a realistic means of propaganda in the context of a slave colony. Back in colonial France, the reaction was one of initial disbelief, followed by a strong conviction that the slaves would lose. In the opinion of most people in France at that time, since slaves could not conceive of a revolution themselves, then it had to be the result of outside agitators. Trouillot says 'Conservative colonialists and anti-slavery republicans accused each other of being the brains behind the revolt. Inferences were drawn from writings that could not have possibly reached or moved the slaves . . . even if they knew how to read'. The absence of a written record of the thoughts of the revolutionaries may have contributed to the failure of historians to engage with the revolution until recently. According to Trouillot, historians have either erased or trivialized the revolution. The great British historian, Eric Hobsbawm scarcely mentions Haiti in his book *The Age of Revolutions, 1789-1843*, while other writers have seen the outcome of the revolution as a medical issue: the French were defeated by disease, not by the Haitians.

Trouillot (2015, 99) says 'What we are observing here is archival power at its strongest, the power to define what is and what is not a serious object of research and therefore of mention'. Anthropologist Ann Stoler (2002) has written of colonial archives both as documents of exclusion and as monuments to particular configurations of power in themselves. She adds that 'If it is obvious that colonial archives are products of state machines, it is less obvious that they are, in their own right, technologies that bolstered the production of those states themselves.' More recently Jordanna Bailkin, a student of modern Britain and empire, argued that:

Many scholars have argued that colonialism was archive-dependent from its earliest manifestations. The first European colonial explorers perceived detailed recordkeeping as a vital matter of life and death: a mechanism to recalibrate the demographic balance of power between rulers and ruled. We might say the same, of course, about most systems of governance. Yet some have proposed that colonial states are more closely allied with archives than are other state forms, because colonialism relies on the upholding of classificatory systems (for example, of racial difference) that require elaborate archival apparatuses.

(Bailkin, 2015, 886)

This is why perhaps the most important British archival scandal of recent years was the revelation in 2011 that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had apparently concealed some 20,000 intelligence, security and other files which British colonial officials had sent back to London as colonies were granted independence in the 1950s and 1960s, as part of a move that was ironically codenamed Operation Legacy. The papers came to light as lawyers acting for former participants in the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya sought redress for their treatment and internment by the British colonial authorities.

When former British colonies won their independence, the normal procedure for dealing with records was that those which had been created locally remained in the country, while correspondence, reports and other papers which had been sent from the colonial governments to the Colonial Office in London were eventually transferred to the UK Public Record Office (now The National Archives). Guidelines issued to colonial governments in 1961 made the further recommendation that documents which might embarrass the British or other governments or certain individuals who had undertaken work of a sensitive nature, or which might compromise sources of intelligence or be used unethically by a successor government, should be sent to London (Banton, 2012, 325).

The files in what became known as the Migrated Archives had been held by the FCO since the 1960s in bureaucratic limbo. For several decades they had all but been forgotten. The FCO did not want to keep the files, but did not wish to return them to the countries where they had come from. In turn The National Archives (TNA) did not want to take the files and advised that, in accordance with normal practice, they should be returned to the former colonies that had created them. In 2010 the FCO commissioned Anthony Cary, a former diplomat, to examine what went wrong and what lessons should be drawn. His report emphasized bureaucratic incompetence and loss of corporate memory rather than any deliberate intention to conceal the existence of the files (Cary, 2011). Eventually they were transferred in batches to TNA where they now form series FCO 141.

The revelation of the existence of this archive changed the view of the end of the British Empire from one that had been generally thought to be benign to one that revealed the true extent of British attempts to suppress independence movements, particularly in Kenya and Cyprus. The American academic Caroline Elkins says 'The overarching takeaway is that the

[British] government itself was involved in a very highly choreographed, systematised process of destroying and removing documents so it could craft the official narrative that sits in these archives' (Parry, 2016; Cobain, 2016, 106, 131).

In addition, as British archivist Mandy Banton (2012, 322) suggests, the removal of this material has affected not only the ability of these countries, who were largely unaware that this material had existed, to reconstruct their national histories, but also their capacity to support good governance and accountability and protect the rights of their citizens. Historians are now beginning to go through the material to discover what stories have been forgotten. Archivists too need to learn the lessons.

Silence in informality

The most obvious reason for silences in an archive is that records have simply not been created. This can happen for a variety of reasons, including deliberate policy that certain decisions would not be recorded, how information was once regarded, or simply the pressure of events. Eighteenth- and 19th-century personnel records of the British armed services, for example, very rarely mention the wives and families of serving soldiers and seamen because as their dependents did not receive a pension there was no requirement to record their details (Fowler, 2011, 106-7).

Non-creation of records may be the result of inertia or have more sinister motives. One obvious threat to the completeness of records is that officials and elected government ministers may not document decision-making processes, or that they might prefer to use informal methods. British Prime Minister Tony Blair's administration (1997-2007) was often characterized as being a 'sofa government'. There was a deliberate policy of turning away from the formal recording of discussions and decisions by government officials to a much more informal approach. The extent of this major cultural shift from a system that revolved around careful record keeping was exposed during the Hutton Inquiry in 2003 into the death of Dr David Kelly, the weapons expert. Jonathan Powell, Blair's chief of staff, revealed that no minutes were taken of meetings relevant to the Inquiry. He was then asked whether minutes were taken of any other government meetings and he replied that:

the usual pattern is about three written records for seventeen meetings a day is the average you sort of get to because there is no purpose served by minutes unless they are either recording people visiting from outside, the president of Nigeria, for example, or something like that, or if they are action points that need to be taken forward. (Moss, 2012, 860-1)

Pressure of events can also restrict what is recorded. At the end of September 2008, Ireland faced a major challenge to its banking system at a time when the world was facing a near-collapse of global debt markets following the financial crisis that began in 2007. The Irish banks were heavily indebted and had lent huge amounts to the construction sector. It was obvious that they were in a very vulnerable position and at the end of that month the Irish government announced a state guarantee for their debts. Soon afterwards, Patrick Honohan, Governor of the Central Bank of Ireland, produced a report into the crisis. In the part of his report discussing the events of September 2008, he pointed out that:

A detailed review of the ensuing discussions is hampered by the absence of an extensive written record of what transpired. Although the minutes of meetings of the CBFSAI [Central Bank and Financial Services Authority Ireland] Board and the [Irish Financial Services Regulatory] Authority during the period contain references to various options, there is an absence of documentation setting forth the advantages and disadvantages of possible alternatives and their quantitative implications. While CBFSAI Board members expressed some broad views on possible approaches; no decisions were taken, as the solutions would need to be found at Governmental level. The key discussions took place via the very many informal contacts and meetings between senior officials of the DSG [Domestic Standing Group] agencies, the NTMA [National Treasury Management Agency], and consultants; what follows relies to a very large extent on the personal recollections of participants. (Honohan, 2010, 8.18)

Although this lack of detailed record keeping may be understandable in a crisis, it seems it was endemic within the Central Bank and Financial Services organization. Honohan describes how:

The minutes of both CBFSAI Board and Authority meetings typically record only the broad consensus on the issues discussed and any decisions taken. They

do not describe in any detail the frequent debates and often significant differences of opinion that, according to Board and Authority members interviewed for this Report, existed on some issues, especially the possible risks to financial stability.

(Honohan, 2010, 3.17)

Perhaps the most notorious example of a deliberate policy not to record decisions relates to the Suez Crisis in 1956, when the government of Egypt made the decision to nationalize the largely British-owned Suez Canal (Black, 2006). Lord Bancroft, who was private secretary to a senior minister of the British government at the time of the crisis, later told a television station that:

The difficulty about the whole of the Suez episode was that it wasn't dealt with as part of the normal system of Cabinet government. There was a little committee . . . everything seemed to be conducted in a hurried, reactive, almost furtive way . . . It seemed to me to typify the dangers of trying to run something as if it were a private laundry and not, as we then were, a major country on the world stage engaged in a singularly difficult adventure.

(Hennessy, 1986, 8)

Several key records were destroyed at the time, on the orders of the British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden. They related to secret meetings held between representatives of Britain, France and Israel from 22 to 24 October 1956. Against all the rules, Eden insisted that no written account of the meetings be prepared. The outcome of the meetings was the Sèvres Protocol in which Israel undertook to attack Egypt, prompting Britain and France to invade on the pretext of 'separating the combatants' and thus protecting the canal. The fate of the British copy of the Protocol has long been a source of considerable speculation (The National Archives, 2006). According to one of the British officials, Sir Patrick Dean, on returning from Sèvres on 24 October he went immediately to 10 Downing Street. There he met Eden and a small group of senior ministers and handed the Protocol over to Eden. Eden was clearly upset that the agreement had been put down in writing, and it is likely that it was tossed onto a fire by Eden or one of his advisors. Fortunately, a copy survives in an Israeli archive.

Private archives are sometimes skewed to put their creator in a good light. This is perhaps most often the case with those politicians who are

aware of history and how historians might use their papers to interpret their achievements. The US President Franklin D. Roosevelt rarely put his thoughts down on paper and gave only a partial glimpse of what he was thinking or planning even to those people he trusted. At the opening of his presidential library at Hyde Park, NY, in June 1941, he was asked why he seemed particularly cheerful. 'I am thinking,' he replied, 'of all the historians who will come here thinking they'll find the answers to their questions' (MacMillan, 2015, 38-9).

Debate about British relations with Nazi Germany during the spring and summer of 1940 is similarly hampered because the private papers of many of the key participants are missing. According to the American historian John Lukacs, who has written extensively on the subject:

[The British Prime Minister Neville] Chamberlain did not weed his papers and correspondence . . . or at least not much. [Foreign Secretary Lord] Halifax . . . did so more considerably, as did Lady Halifax . . . the diaries of [the minister] Sir Maurice Hankey have been culled: there is either nothing or very little for each year of the period 1939-1944, though some of his correspondence is there. In the papers of David Margesson, the [Conservative] Chief Whip . . . the years 1939-45 are missing. (Lukacs, 2001, 57-8)

Conflict and oppression as a cause of silence

The partial and political nature of archives is nowhere clearer than when we look at war and political conflict. In some cases, records relating to warfare may be kept closed for very long periods. Sometimes, records of oppressive acts are never created, while in others, records of oppression are destroyed in order to protect the oppressors. In France, files relating to the collaborationist regime in Vichy between 1940 and 1944 remained inaccessible until they were finally opened at the beginning of 2016 (France 24, 2015). The papers include more than 200,000 documents relating to cases brought before special courts established under the regime. They reveal details about the work of brigades made up of French citizens which targeted and rounded up Resistance fighters, communists and Jews during the German occupation. The most sensitive of the files refers to the 'shadowing' of citizens - the tracking of individuals and Resistance groups - with records of interrogation and letters of denunciation in which French

citizens were encouraged to spy and inform on one another. Jean-Pierre Azéma, a specialist on World War II, said that allowing public access to the archives was crucial to understanding France's role during the Vichy period, but cautioned that any information extrapolated from the documents should be used responsibly:

When we use these archival documents to understand the past, we need to exercise caution about the kind of conclusions we draw . . . There's an obligation - that applies not just to historians - but to everyone who has the privilege of accessing these documents, to respect the honour of individuals

(France 24, 2015)

Verne Harris (2002) has described in detail how the apartheid regime in South Africa destroyed public records in order to keep processes secret and how, during the transfer of power from 1990 to 1994, the state engaged in a large-scale sanitization of its memory resources in order to keep certain information out of the hands of a future democratic government. A similar pattern of behaviour had occurred in what was then Southern Rhodesia before the transfer of power to majority government in 1980. In South Africa, the destruction was widely suspected and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission which was set up to investigate abuses during the apartheid years conducted a major investigation into the loss of records. Not only had the operational records of the regime's security apparatus been burned or shredded, but also the records they had confiscated over the years from individuals and organizations had suffered the same fate. Even so, significant accumulations of records that had somehow escaped the purge survive.

At no time are records at greater risk than during a war and Britain's archival heritage bears deep scars of the two world wars. During both world wars hundreds of tons of documents were sent away for reuse as scrap paper. One of the great gaps in the British archival record relates to World War I. The vast majority of files, including a number of significant archives, have been destroyed, some by fire, but most deliberately. And yet this was not meant to happen. In the 1920s, it was recognized that:

The use that can be made of these records as sources for an authentic history of the World War will depend on the ideals and demands of coming generations:

yet it is already clear that the chief interest of the present generation is not to prepare for war, but to assure the establishment of peace, the eventual study of wartime documents will be directed to some other end than military and naval strategy or diplomatic chicanery . . . The historian of the World War who would like to know the whole truth about its causes and results will therefore, have special need of reference to authentic documents, many of which lie outside the ordinary categories (Hall, 1925, xiv)

Initially it was proposed that the new Imperial War Museum, whose remit was to collect and preserve artefacts relating to World War 1, should also preserve the archival record. On good archival grounds the Public Record Office opposed the proposal and there was little public enthusiasm (Cantwell, 1991, 384). Instead a national War Records Disposal Committee was established to decide which records should be kept, both centrally and locally. It seems to have been particularly ineffective, to the extent that its own records have long since been destroyed. Reverting to the pre-war system most British government departments prepared schedules of material to be destroyed without consulting historians or other potential users. As a result, huge amounts of potentially valuable documents were lost including those of the Ministry of Information 'which should have been a great intellectual force on the side of the Allies but has left few traces of its proceedings for the information of the historians present or to come' and the National Register of men eligible for conscription which was destroyed in its entirety in 1919 (Hall, 1925, 76, 89). Locally the preservation of material depended largely on the goodwill of local authorities. Some boroughs took great pride in keeping records of the war (although as relatively little has survived to the present day one has to conclude that it was not always an enduring pride), but 'public authorities in [many] localities could not be induced to take any steps for the care of their war records, and . . . private efforts for this purpose would not be forthcoming' (Hall, 1925, 113). One exception was Bedfordshire, where the dynamic county archivist George Herbert Fowler acquired various collections of war-related material for the county record office (Bell and Stitt, 2002, 253).

Why was this the position? In the early 1920s, Bedfordshire was the only English county that had a recognizable record office. In most other counties records would have found their way to the central library or been kept in attics and basements, where undoubtedly many would have been

donated to the scrap paper drive during World War II. Probably more telling is the fact that within a couple of years of the Armistice in 1918 there was a clear desire to regard the World War as being a horrible mistake to be forgotten about. In describing the destruction of the records of the Ministry of National Service, Hall writes (1925, 81–2) that: ‘with the confusion and disillusionment that followed the application of reconstructive measures, a revolution of sentiment can be noticed which eventually led to a drastic revision of the records of the Ministry’. The future needs of historians were as nothing compared to national sentiment.

By 1939 the lessons of World War I had largely been learnt. During World War II there was a better understanding of the need to protect the records and also of the future needs of historians. As Joan Wake, secretary of the Northamptonshire Record Society, wrote to *The Times* at the height of the Blitz in November 1940: ‘If English history does not matter, all this destruction does not matter in the least, and the sooner we boil down Domesday Book to make glue for aeroplanes, and use the famous “scrap of paper” to make wads for cartridges the better’ (Cantwell, 1991, 439).

But there was a new threat, in the form of destruction from the air, to which paper was particularly vulnerable, and a number of archives suffered as the result of bombing. In 1941 the Public Record Office asked the Ministry of Home Security, which was responsible for civil defence, to circulate regional headquarters with a plea to look out for and take special care of archival material damaged as the result of air raids. Among many other acts of destruction, a major loss was the burning of a huge collection of War Office records at the Army Record Store during the Blitz in September 1940 (Seligmann, 2006, 52–3). In 1942 the records of the 1931 Census for England and Wales were destroyed in a huge fire in a store at Hayes in Middlesex. Although the cause of the fire is not known, it was not due to enemy action but may have been the result of a discarded cigarette (www.1911census.org.uk/1931.htm).

There were also new resources available to archivists, particularly the British Records Association, which had been formed in 1932 in part to preserve collections of archives locally. The association did sterling work in ensuring that documents of value were not wantonly destroyed (Ketelaar, 2013, 29). According to Deputy Keeper of Public Records Cyril Flower (1943, 27), it gave ‘any help possible in the removal of those [records] which were exposed to the greatest danger and in the repair of those that had

already suffered injury . . . [and] to arouse public interest in the dangers threatened by raids and to preserve from salvage documents which have historical value.’

The Public Record Office took the lead in paper salvage drives across British government departments, making it easier to destroy records of limited value while protecting those of perceived importance (Cantwell, 1991, 432). In addressing the Royal Historical Society in the autumn of 1943, Flower blandly reassured members that Inspecting Officers from the Public Record Office: ‘have never knowingly sacrificed records which might be of real use to the future historian. At the same time it is believed that the cellars of Whitehall and of many other repositories up and down the land have made and are making a rich contribution to the salvage movement’ (Flower, 1943, 26).

However, in the 1950 Webb Lecture, Sir William Hancock, Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at London University, foresaw difficulties ahead in securing an adequate record of World War II:

I doubt whether the old procedures of the Public Record Office can cope with it. Some of the most precious grain of war-historical record never got into the registered files and may never come to the . . . Office. Conversely in the registered files of the war period there are tares by the million, but good wheat is mingled with the tares. How can they be separated? (Rock, 2016, 64)

In fact, there are surprisingly few serious gaps in the surviving World War II records of the British government. This is doubly remarkable when one considers that the vast majority of files were hurriedly transferred to the Public Record Office between 1969 and 1972 after the rule regarding the period of closure of government files was reduced from 50 to 30 years. Much of course has been destroyed, but with the perhaps understandable exception of the Special Operations Executive, which ran agents and supported resistance movements in occupied countries, whose records were heavily weeded immediately after the end of the war, most of the key records vital to the study of the war survive and are in the public domain. The big exceptions, as we will see, are the records of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and to a large extent the Security Service (MI5).

Selection as a cause of the silence

Selection is at the heart of the current archival process and failures in selection can lead to archival silences. In the paper era, archival institutions traditionally only took a very small proportion of the number of records created by organizations. Verne Harris expressed this very clearly in a South African context:

Even if we were to preserve every record generated throughout South Africa, and conceding the remarkably comprehensive and detailed documentation of process offered by the computer, we would still only have a sliver of a window into South African experience. But of course in practice this record universum is substantially reduced through deliberate and inadvertent destruction by records creators and managers leaving a sliver of a sliver from which archivists select what they will preserve. And they do not preserve much – for instance at present the National Archives [of South Africa] aims to preserve five per cent of all public records . . . So archives offer researchers at best a sliver of a sliver of a sliver.

(Harris, 1997, 137)

If the archival institutions are South Africa's central memory institutions, then we are in deep amnesic trouble. Harris's description of archives as a sliver of a sliver of a sliver seems to be generally valid; at the National Archives of the United States, archivists typically appraise 2-5% of US government records as meeting their requirements for archival preservation (National Archives of the United States, 2016).

Inevitably there has been much destruction of individual items or patchy survival of material within particular series of records. Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar argues that:

The decision to destroy a document is as much part of the archival consciousness as the decision to keep it. What is recorded and archived, what is left out, what is destroyed, what is determined by what I have called archivalisation, meaning the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving – or not.

(Ketelaar, 2013, 28)

He quotes the former Archivist of the United States, Frank Burke, who asked: 'What is it within the nature of society that makes it create the records that it does? Is this impulse purely a practical one, or is there

something in the human psyche that dictates the keeping of a record, and what is the motivation for this act?' (Ketelaar, 2013, 29).

Undoubtedly the key moment in the life of a document is its appraisal: the point at which a decision is made as to whether it is worthy of being kept. This is probably the most important task engaged in by the archivist or records manager. There may be schedules and plans available to help in the selection process, but ultimately it is the record keeper's responsibility to decide what is kept.

The expectations of the end-user are high. The historian expects the archivist to make the right decision: to keep material of genuine historical interest. And the organization expects to be able to find material that will be useful to it in the performance of its business. In selecting records the archivist has to second-guess history: what will be of value in 5, 50 or 500 years' time? Canadian archivist Terry Cook reinforces the importance of these decisions:

We need to remain extraordinarily sensitive to the political, social, philosophical, and ethical nature of archival appraisal, for that process defines the creators, the functions, and the activities to be reflected in archives, by defining and selecting in turn which related documents are to be preserved permanently, and thus are to enjoy all subsequently flowing archival activities (processing, description, preservation, reference, online posting, exhibition, and so on); and, with finality, appraisal also starkly determines which documents are destroyed, excluded from archives, their creators forgotten, effaced from memory – all this done by us, the archivists.

(Cook, 2007, 174)

In truth, none of us can really know what is likely to be of importance in the future, but the archivist must make shrewd guesses. Certain types of records cry out to be kept: in a context of commercial business, board minutes, share registers and related paperwork that record the key decisions made by the organization need to be kept, both for legal reasons but also because of their importance to the company now and in the future. At the other end of the scale of importance, luncheon vouchers and pay slips can be discarded, because they have little or no discernible historical value. But what about the voluminous files of correspondence or financial papers which may better reflect the company's ethos and, in the longer term, may be of great interest to historians? They are all too often either destroyed in

their entirety or heavily weeded. In Britain, rare exceptions in the field of banking, for example, are Rothschilds and Barings, where much correspondence and other papers about their business interests across the globe survives in their archives. More typical are the rather uninformative minutes of the Court of Directors of the Colonial Bank, which operated in the Caribbean and Latin America from the 1830s, which offer a very limited insight to British financial interests in the region (see Barclays Group Archives, ref 0038-0001, 0002). Unfortunately, letters from the bank's branches and agents, which would undoubtedly tell a fuller story, have long since been destroyed. Conversely, many records of the 19th-century London bank Smith, Payne & Smiths survive but their minute books do not (see RBS Heritage Services website).

In recent years, the selection of archive material has become contested territory as historians and archivists have questioned the reasons behind the selection and destruction of material. In particular, there has been concern that archivists are not selecting files that reflect the society in which they live.

Records management within British government was traditionally conducted by a team of Inspecting Officers from the Public Record Office (PRO), who agreed destruction schedules with departments. Until the 1960s the PRO generally left government departments alone, rarely visiting or offering advice. This was not considered the work for scholars, as the senior staff of the Office regarded themselves. Departments could and did make mistakes in the selection of records. The Home Office, for example, took pride in destroying as much as it could (see *The National Archives* 1). Meanwhile, between the wars, War Office reviewers managed to consign to oblivion vast swathes of important files, including much about the German Army (Seligmann, 2006, 52-3). In local government, apart from a basic need to keep the council's minutes and financial records, there was little oversight of archives and each local authority could operate its own record-keeping policies more or less as the county archivist or county records committee thought fit.

In 1954 a report of a committee chaired by Sir James Grigg recommended a thorough overhaul of record management procedures throughout central government. It was followed by the passing of a new Public Records Act in 1958. Thereafter, new records management techniques were introduced across central government departments, with the Public Record

Office taking an increasingly active role in advising departments about records selection. The Wilson Committee, which reviewed the operation of the public records system in 1980, found that the Grigg system was generally flexible enough to meet very changed circumstances, but called for more resources to be devoted to departmental records management services and the appointment of sector bodies of outside advisors, historians for the most part, to advise on the selection of the records of government (Lord Chancellor's Department, 1981, 990-2).

However, it would be wrong to be complacent. Even in recent years, in the name of good record keeping a great deal has been destroyed or, occasionally, unnecessarily kept. In a recent damning article on the management of legal records since the Grigg Report, British criminologist Paul Rock wrote:

One thing that struck us almost immediately, and struck us by surprise, was that whole areas of criminal justice history that might have been documented in that archive are now blank and irretrievable. Over and over again, we stumbled upon voids in the historical evidence, and we all too often found ourselves floundering and foundering. Thus, although the papers of all Royal Commissions and many interdepartmental committees are meticulously preserved, the material that must once have documented the deliberations that initiated them, and the material that documented their consequences, may no longer remain. . . . No doubt much that is lost is of little or no value, but the *lacunae* that [we] continually encountered are there, and some of them are baffling indeed.

(Rock, 2016, 60, 64)

The wrong kind of silence

But what if archival institutions have been deliberately collecting the wrong material all along? Should archives 'continue to be preoccupied with important people, the extraordinary as opposed to the ordinary: "the lives, thoughts, social contribution or even importance of the great majority of people were, for the most part, unwritten and unrecognised"' (Johnston, 2001, quoting Laberge, 1987). Many of today's users want: '... the minor narratives, the untold stories, the traces, the whispers and the expressions of marginalised identities that people yearn to find in the archives' (Bastian and Alexander, 2009, xxiii). However, archival institutions have focused on

the records of the rich and powerful – landowners, politicians and policymakers – material that offers an ordered view of society and the people who ran it. What was usually excluded was the messy, the ephemeral and the voices of people who are not ‘like us’. One notable exception is the long-established Women’s Work Collection at the Imperial War Museum, which consciously reflected the contribution made to the war effort between 1914 and 1918 by women from all levels of society (Wilkinson, 1992). The consequence of this emphasis has been for archives to largely focus on the material created by the great and good and, until well into the post-war period, to ignore the needs of users and potential users who have other interests. The collecting and acquisition policies of archival institutions were slow in making changes to respond to wider needs. In 1999 the Black and Asian Studies Association, for example, examined archival provision in 112 institutions across the UK and concluded that ‘almost no public archives have been able, or have tried, to make a meaningful effort to collect material from Black organisations or people’ (Johnston, 2001, 215). And as late as 2007, British archival scholar Andrew Flinn argued that: ‘in reality the mainstream or formal archive sector does not contain and represent the voices of the non-elites, the grassroots, the marginalised’ (Flinn, 2007, 152).

One answer is for groups who feel marginalized to set up their own archives. The concern that archival institutions were not meeting the needs of local communities has led to the establishment of a number of community archives in Britain and other countries. They are spontaneous attempts to preserve and make available a community’s history and struggles, particularly when the community goes ‘through rapid and significant change and feel that they are in the process of losing their identity or having that identity marginalised’ (Flinn, 2007, 159–60). This is often related to a feeling that individual voices are not being heard. Flinn suggests that the link between them is that they: ‘define *themselves* on the basis of locality, culture, faith, background or other shared identity or interest’ in which ‘community participation, control and ownership is essential’ (Flinn, 2007, 153). In these contexts, the term archive is usually defined very broadly: ‘In particular photographs, film, oral material and the personal ephemera of individual lives all contribute to bringing to life individuals and communities that otherwise lie rather lifeless or without colour in the paper record . . . [which] does not fit well with narrow and

perhaps overly restrictive professional definitions of records and archives’ (Flinn, 2007, 153, 167).

Such initiatives represent a challenge to the traditional archival institution. The vision statement of the Community Archives and Heritage Group in the UK argues that member groups ‘make an invaluable contribution to the preservation of a more inclusive and diverse local and national heritage . . . [and they] seek to document of all manner of local, occupational, ethnic, faith and other diverse communities’ (see Community Archives and Heritage Group website).

These groups reflect a concern, particularly among immigrant communities, that local archival institutions have few records about their experiences and perhaps are perceived as not being interested in collecting such material. Describing the establishment of the African and Asian Visual Artists’ Archive, the cultural commentator Stuart Hall noted that the absence of any sustained attention or critical dialogue within the dominant institutions of the art world, and a systematic marginalization over the years of work from the Afro-Caribbean and Asian diasporas, meant that the artists themselves have been ‘obliged to act first as curators, and now as archivists’ (Hall, 2001, 89–92). Alternatively, as with various aviation and railway archives, there was a feeling that archival institutions were not interested in preserving specific detailed technical collections, perceived as being ephemeral to the main archive holdings – but of great interest to railway and aviation historians.

This is coupled with the wish by communities to use their archives to tell their story in their own way unmediated by professional historians and archivists. As Joan Nestle, a lesbian activist in New York, wrote: ‘the strongest reason for creating the [New York Lesbian] archives was to end the silence of patriarchal history about us – women who loved women – we wanted our story to be told by us, shared by us, and preserved by us’ (quoted in Flinn and Stephens, 2009, 3).

The 1970s saw the beginning of a long-running debate about what archives (and archivists) were for. In 1970 the radical American historian Howard Zinn gave a paper to the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in which he contended that the archival record was based around the rich and powerful elements in society, while the ‘poor and impotent’ continued to languish in ‘archival obscurity’. And he urged members of the society ‘to compile a whole new world of documentary

material about the lives, desires and needs of ordinary people (Ham, 1975, 5). At the meeting the following year the society's president F. Gerald Ham argued that the archivist's primary responsibility was to:

provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time . . . If we are not holding up that mirror, if we are not helping people understand the world they live in, and this is not what archives are all about, then I do not know what it is we are doing that is all that important.

(Ham, 1975, 13)

Key to this is the selection of the material that will be available to future generations. Terry Cook (2007) noted: 'We literally are creating archives. We are deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not'. The debate has two different but related aspects. The first discusses the need for archival institutions, local, national and digital, to be as representative of society as possible. The second asks whether archival collection policies also reflect today's society.

In the UK, the Grigg Committee of 1954 thought that the Public Record Office should not preserve records which were solely of genealogical or biographical value. A decade later, in 1965, the Keeper of Public Records, Sir David Evans, asked the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Council on Public Records for guidance on what records relating to individuals should be kept. Evans was concerned about the long-term storage implications of keeping large volumes of records that he felt were of limited interest. The Advisory Council agreed that only the censuses need be preserved in total and that other records, including post-1900 military service records, could be sampled and destroyed.

Sampling of records was once seen as being one way forward. It was used to select material from large series of records such as case histories containing material that was thought to be of little value individually, but 'taken in complete series or in scientific sample can be of very great value to the historian or statistician' (Wilson, 1982, 988). Records professionals attempted to produce samples on an objective basis. However, it is difficult to eliminate bias from sampling schemes, and some approaches that aimed to be unbiased turned out not to be so (Johnson, Ranade and Thomas, 2014, 227-8). Some samples were simply too small to be of any practical

value - the records of the Supplementary Benefits Commission which dealt with six million claims a year in the 1980s were sampled and a sample of 200 files was collected at ten-yearly intervals.

In the event, sampling of records managed to alienate almost all user groups: many academics need bigger samples than commonly taken in such exercises, or just those relating to their own subject of research. And, when the records are name-rich, genealogists want access to the whole series (Higgs, 1984, 91, 94).

To an extent, with the arrival first of microform, and then of digitization services and electronic record keeping, the need for sampling large series of records has been at least partly removed. The Public Record Office decided to sample series of Widow's War Pension application forms (series PIN 82) and War Pension application forms (PIN 26). Preserving both series in their entirety would have proved invaluable sources for social historians and genealogists alike. But neither the space, nor the technology was then available. Two decades later it was possible to make all of the surviving World War I army service records (WO 363, WO 364) available in 36,000 microform boxes and since 2008 they have been available online.

However, The National Archives (TNA) of the UK continues to advocate sampling of a range of records, albeit in a form that is based on value judgements rather than statistical sampling techniques. Its *Crown Court Operational Selection Policy* (The National Archives, 2014) indicates that Crown Court files dating from 1972 onwards should only be selected for permanent preservation if they concern multiple killings or sexual crimes, cases of media interest, terrorism, large drugs trials or espionage or if they raise particular legal points or are unusual or interesting in some other way. This means that individuals, who commit lesser crimes such as burglary or grievous bodily harm, as well as their victims, are omitted from the permanent record. It also means that it is not possible for researchers to conduct the sort of detailed analysis of crimes and criminal behaviour that is possible for the records of the Central Criminal Court (the 'Old Bailey records'), which were always treated separately, and where most cases survive. It is, however, an improvement over Assize Court records before the 1950s, whose surviving case files largely relate only to murders.

Attitudes have changed, partly as the result of a new generation of archivists, but also because of pressures from the family history community. In 1954 in the UK, the Society of Genealogists told the Grigg Committee

that, in general, genealogists made little use of records in the Public Record Office (Committee on Departmental Records, 1954, 24). By the 21st century, family historians now account for over 70% of users and are a powerful although not always very vocal lobby, influencing decisions to keep records and to catalogue some collections in much more detail than others, often because they volunteer to do it. Every series of records that contains names is pressed into service. Arguably, such activity is reconfiguring the archive away from being an objective evidential resource into a subjective personal repository (Moss, 2007, 46).

Attitudes towards the selection of large series of records primarily with family historians in mind have gradually shifted over the past 50 years and now, the possibilities of digitization mean that the UK's National Health Service Register ('1939 Register'), as well as 20th-century military service records, have been preserved in full, and are being made available online by commercial organizations at minimal cost to the host repositories.

The silence of the secret

Archives should be a beacon of light. But so often, as this book suggests, this is not the case. There are constant pressures on archivists not to release material, to keep it secret to spare the blushes of the powerful. Against this are the pressures for public archival institutions across the world to provide access to documents that would otherwise remain closed or perhaps be destroyed.

How do we approach situations where we really think there are silences that could be filled by material which exists but is not available? One answer is to seek to use legislation. Legislation is, literally, a legitimate way of opening up records. In recent years, across the world, Freedom of Information (FoI) laws have given citizens the legal right to access documents held by governments and some other institutions. In most FoI legislation government information is assumed to be public unless specifically exempt by the law itself, and individuals can access them without explaining why or for what purpose they need them. In short, FoI laws imply a change in the principle of the provision of government information from a 'need to know' basis to a 'right to know' basis (Ackerman and Sandoval-Ballesteros, 2006, 93). By September 2013, at least 95 countries had Freedom of Information legislation, while a number of

dependent territories and international organizations also had such legislation in place (see Right2info website).

In public, governments are in favour of FoI, but in practice they are wary of it and its implications. The first modern FoI legislation was adopted in the USA, and signed into law by President Lyndon B Johnson on 4 July 1966. Although Johnson had deep reservations about the legislation, in public he was supportive. An eloquent press statement proclaimed:

This legislation springs from one of our most essential principles: A democracy works best when the people have all the information that the security of the Nation permits. No one should be able to pull curtains of secrecy around decisions which can be revealed without injury to the public interest.

(National Security Archive website, Document 31)

But in private he was very much opposed, telling aides that the 'goddamn bill will screw the Johnson Administration' (Ciaramella, 2016). Subsequent legislation and executive orders, notably by President Obama, has strengthened the Act. However, most intelligence records remain off limits. According to Ed Cohen, Director of the Office of Information Management of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), sources and methods are 'the lifeblood of the intelligence business' and have to be protected: the CIA will:

never betray the trust of those who provide it with critical information and the CIA also will not disclose information that could jeopardise other intelligence assets and technical capabilities that are critical to its work.

(Bennett, 2002, 29)

Even so Bradley Smith, writing in the late 1990s, claimed that because of the changed circumstances resulting from the end of the Cold War:

In the United States historical records of the military and naval intelligence services and the [CIA] were among the first to pass into the custody of the National Archives. By the mid-1990s, American historians were completing studies in intelligence history based on new releases by the US government.

(Smith, 1999, 170)

Indeed it is now possible to download some carefully chosen historical

documents from the CIA's 'Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room' and put in a request for release of closed material.

The UK government unfortunately has a different culture, one of ingrained secrecy at the heart of government. According to the British journalist Ian Cobain:

the application of official secrecy in Britain has, for the past couple of centuries, gone far beyond that which is required for the safe and secure business of government. Official secrecy is not merely rooted in the preferences and practices of those in government. It is integral to public life. Britain is not a nation where official information is merely kept closed on occasion and handled with care: it is a nation where a culture of secrecy runs wide and deep.

(Cobain, 2016, xii)

After a long campaign, Tony Blair's government in 2000 finally enacted FoI legislation in the UK. Again, senior politicians were against it. In his memoirs, Blair later wrote: 'Freedom of Information: Three harmless words. I look at those words as I write them, and feel like shaking my head till it drops off my shoulders. You idiot. You naïve, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it' (quoted in Cobain, 2016, 156).

Blair claimed that his antipathy to FoI lay in the fact that it would be used by journalists to attack politicians: 'For political leaders, it's like saying to someone who is hitting you over the head with a stick "Hey, use this instead" and handing them a mallet instead.' He managed to delay its implementation for four years (Cobain, 2016, 156). Blair was probably worrying unnecessarily: the British act was less rigorous than its American equivalent, with many more exemptions. In 2015 the British government set up an Independent Commission on Freedom of Information to review the Act's workings. There were fears that the Commission would restrict access yet further, but its members found the system was generally working well, although they declined to take the opportunity to extend it to departments that had been exempted from the original legislation (Independent Commission on Freedom of Information, 2016).

FoI legislation has been seen by some as a solution to the so-called 'accountability deficit', particularly in newly created democracies, where

citizens have little real power other than the right to remove governments at the time of national elections (Ackerman and Sandoval-Ballesteros, 2006, 85). With this in mind, other writers have argued that FoI presents a radical opportunity to 'punctuate' existing organizational equilibrium, thereby enabling strategic change in the ways that information is valued and managed within public bodies (Burt and Taylor, 2007, 181). In this way, FoI has opened up regimes to transparency and accountability, and given additional legitimacy to records and archives. Though imperfect in execution, FoI is still a powerful tool in the armoury of the researcher.

In countries where FoI is in force, it has changed the relationship between the public, the archival institution and public agencies. It has forced the release of certain historic material that otherwise would remain closed. Statistics provided by The National Archives (England and Wales) reveal that use of the FoI Act between 2013 and September 2015 led to the release of 3,514 records out of 6,731 requests to the Archives. In addition, another 1,038 files were partially released, often with minor redactions. And in some cases it has made the archival institution irrelevant as journalists and concerned citizens bypass it to deal with the organization which created the information directly, although there are certain wide-ranging exemptions which usually come into play where some harm might result if the information was to be released, such as releasing private details about an individual. This has lasting implications for silences within the archives in how repositories will be used in future and for records management and collection policies (Shepherd, Stevenson and Flinn, 2010, 343).

At the heart of FoI is a dilemma. What needs to be kept secret for operational reasons and what can, and should, be released? In a Congressional hearing John D. Moss, the driving force behind the introduction of FoI in the USA, summed up the dilemma: 'No one would want to throw open government files that exposed national defence secrets to enemy eyes', but neither should government 'impose the iron hand of censorship on routine information, even information that might embarrass public officials' (Lemov, 2011).

In the USA, FoI legislation received a shock, from which it is still recovering, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The USA PATRIOT Act, passed in October 2001, significantly enhanced the powers of the intelligence services and limited access to their records. In an article for *The Nation* Bruce Shapiro suggested that:

From four-star generals to lowly webmasters, [Washington] is in information lockdown. Never in the nation's history has the flow of information from government to press and public been shut off so comprehensively and quickly as in the weeks following September 11. Much of the shutdown seems to have little to do with preventing future terrorism and everything to do with the Administration's laying down a new across-the-board standard for centralized control of the public's right to know. (Shapiro, 2001)

He argued that edicts from the then Attorney General John Ashcroft were in effect creating a 'born secret' standard; in the words of the Federation of American Scientists, the order 'appears to exploit the current circumstances' to turn the FoI Act into an Official Secrets Act.

If the American system relating to intelligence records is still largely predicated on openness, the opposite is true in Britain, where it was not until 1989 that the intelligence services were put on a legal footing. Access to the records is very limited. Only the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) has released the bulk of its archives up until the beginning of the Cold War. The Security Service (MI5) has transferred about 5800 files to The National Archives, largely relating to the monitoring of spies and potential enemies of the state from the 1930s through into the Cold War, many of which have been heavily redacted. This is about 1% of its known archives (Cobain, 2016, 243-4).

However, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, or MI6) has not formally released any archival material. Along with Special Forces units, it has a blanket exemption to keep its archives away from public scrutiny. In February 1998, the then Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, who was responsible for SIS, explained in a written answer to the House of Commons that he 'recognised the overwhelmingly strong reason for the policy, adding that when individuals or organisations co-operate with SIS they do so because an unshakable commitment is given never to reveal their identities' (Bennett, 2002, 26). Most of MI6's archives created before World War II appear to have been destroyed (Bennett, 2002, 28). As Cobain points out, this blanket ban stretches credulity; that records of the Agadir Crisis of 1911 or on German pre-1914 naval intentions are still inaccessible is absurd (Cobain, 2016, 245).

It is not possible to totally screen off the intelligence services from the rest of government or society as a whole. Often the results of doing so end

in farce, at least so far as archives are concerned. In the USA, in the 'information lockdown' after the 2001 attacks, many files were suddenly closed. At Duke University in North Carolina, Anne Miller, the public documentation librarian, was suddenly ordered to withdraw a disc: 'It concerned [details of] national water supplies, but we weren't asked to withdraw the CD-ROM on state water supplies, which we also have. And this notice only applied to depository libraries. What if one of our geologists or geographers had purchased a copy? They didn't have to return it. So it was a little odd' (Duke University, 2002). In Britain reviewers redact pages or blank out references to MI6 in documents from other government departments being transferred to The National Archives, although knowledgeable researchers can sometimes work out the names of the agents whose details have been redacted.

The intelligence services are not the only part of British government to retain huge collections of material. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) maintains a considerable secret archive at Swadlincote in the English Midlands (Cobain, 2016, 154). It is mainly an intermediate repository keeping files before they are destroyed or transferred to The National Archives. But according to an article in *The Observer*.

The hidden archive includes what is described as 'hundreds and hundreds of boxes', each containing about 10 files, that were sent to the warehouse when the British army's Northern Ireland headquarters closed four years ago. One MoD archivist describes it as looking like 'the final scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*', in which box after box can be seen stretching into the distance.

(Cobain, 2013)

A huge collection of material, known as the Non-Standard Files or the Special Collections, some of it dating back to the Crimean War of the 1850s, is still held by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). There are probably 600,000 files awaiting transfer to The National Archives, destruction or, inevitably in a few cases, retention by the department. Transferring the whole collection would double the current holdings of Foreign Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office records already available at The National Archives. An inventory is available online which gives a tantalizing glimpse into the treasures that await researchers when the material is finally transferred, from Palestine Police medal awards to

the evacuation of West Berlin in case of war (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2014). Unfortunately, because of cuts in establishment and lack of political will, it may be decades before the records finally arrive at The National Archives. The FCO announced in 2014 that it would transfer 10% of the documents it considered of greatest interest in the next decade (Cobain, 2016, 136-9).

A more insidious way of maintaining the secrecy of the archives is the failure to transfer material that is due to be released. In the UK, the Public Records Act 1958 instructed government departments to transfer material to the Public Record Office after 50 years. In 1968 this was reduced to 30 years. A further review in the late 2000s led to the decision to reduce this to 20 years. In order to minimize the effect on departments this was to be phased in over a ten-year period. Over the past few years there has been a change in making files available after 30 years at The National Archives. Much more has been retained by departments. Of files created between 1972 and 1974 by MoD, the Cabinet Office, the FCO, and the Prime Minister's Office, about 6% are still closed or retained in their department of origin (2606 out of 41,320), but for files between 1982 and 1984 around 14% are still closed or retained (6081 out of 44,267). It is noticeable that both MoD and the Prime Minister's Office have transferred far fewer files from the 1980s than they did for the same period of the 1970s. This may be partly explained, but only in part, by the Falklands War of 1982, the Miners' Strike of 1984, and 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, as these events still have a resonance in modern Britain or affect diplomatic relations.

And what is The National Archives doing to ensure that departments obey both the letter and the spirit of the law? On the surface, it is not doing much. In September 2015 responsibility for its records management work was transferred to the Cabinet Office, one of the departments most prone to retaining material, while the remainder of The National Archives was transferred from the Ministry of Justice to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The Advisory Council on National Records and Archives, which operates from The National Archives, is meant to review proposals for the retention and closure of material. In 2015-16 it rejected central government's wishes in just 16 out of 5378 cases (Advisory Council on National Records and Archives, 2016). In addition, The National Archives has a Reclosure Panel that can reclose material that has already been opened.

In 2014, 32 documents were closed out of 40 requests made by government departments largely because of personal sensitivity (TNA, 2015).

Citizens and taxpayers are entitled to know what is being undertaken on their behalf. As the American historian Richard Breitman pointed out:

Governments that withhold critical information from the historical record and the public after the events do their countries and the world no service. But the habit of secrecy is hard to break. No democratic politician or official can control future assessments of him or her by historians, but the longer critical sources are kept secret, the longer such control is possible. (Breitman, 1999, 246)

Archival institutions and archives themselves are one way in which we hold politicians and bureaucrats to account, even if it is at a remove of 30 years or more. FoI legislation coupled with the earlier release of material has made it easier, but if governments give with one hand, they often take away with the other. When government agencies are allowed to keep their records in secret for perpetuity, or selectively release material that reflects well on their work, without being challenged by historians and the archival community, then this damages the institution of the archive. Archivists and users need to be vigilant to ensure that as many documents as possible are available for public access. The worst Silence of the Archive is secrecy.

The silence of destruction

The ultimate Silence of the Archive is the silence of destruction. If files are destroyed, then the value of archives as a means of allowing the public to call its governments and officials to account is diminished. Records management systems and records managers exist to ensure that the appropriate files survive. This is particularly important in a democracy, as the Australian Society of Archivists affirmed in 1997:

The operation of a free and democratic society depends upon the maintenance of the integrity of the public record. Public records are a key source of information about government actions and decisions. They provide essential evidence of the exercise of public trust by public officials. This in turn helps ensure public accountability and protection of the rights of citizens. (Heiner Affair website)

But sometimes politicians and other powerful individuals have other ideas. In the UK there was embarrassment in 2014 when the Home Office admitted that it had destroyed private office papers relating to allegations of child abuse presented by the former Conservative MP Geoffrey Dickens to the then Home Secretary Leon Brittan in 1984. An enquiry conducted by Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam found no evidence that the material still survived or that there was any maliciousness behind their destruction, but their work had been compromised by poor records management by the department:

Inside the Home Office, filing conventions and record keeping methods used during the period place significant limitations on our ability to re-establish a perfect record of what was known to the Home Office at the time that must necessarily condition any observations we make. It is, therefore, not possible to say whether files were ever removed or destroyed to cover up or hide allegations of organized or systematic child abuse by particular individuals because of the systems then in place. It follows that we cannot say that no file was removed or destroyed for that reason. By making those observations they should not be misinterpreted. We do not conclude that there is any basis for thinking that anything happened to files that should not have happened to them, but identify that limitation in our review . . . We found nothing specific to support a concern that the Home Office had failed in any organised or deliberate way to identify and refer individual allegations of child abuse to the police.

(Wanless and Whittam, 2014, 7)

Terry Cook (2002) described how in 1985, the world of Canadian archives was rocked by allegations that vital records which might have revealed the presence in Canada of ex-Nazis, including the notorious Josef Mengele, had been destroyed. Pressure from anti-Nazi investigators had persuaded the Canadian government to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the matter and there was some concern that the bulk destruction of files which had taken place in 1982 had been part of a cover-up. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police felt that its investigation had been hampered by this and the press took it up with headlines such as 'Nazi Inquiry Told Vital Files Were Destroyed "Mysteriously"'. The *Winnipeg Free Press* described it as a scandalous act, while the *Toronto Star* talked of the mysterious destruction of vital files. The chair of the Royal Commission was so concerned that he devoted a day of hearings to the matter. He concluded that the immigration

case files did not contain material which would have been very useful in the hunt for Nazi war criminals because the files did not contain documents or information relating to events prior to the immigrants' landing in Canada. Moreover, there was no evidence that immigrants had been asked about their membership of the Nazi party and so there was no prospect of deporting large numbers of them for lying when completing the immigration form. There had been a large-scale destruction in 1982 because the Canadian Immigration department had disbanded its file retention and disposal unit in 1977 and re-established it in 1981. The large-scale destruction in 1982 was simply dealing with the backlog. No evidence of a conspiracy or cover-up was found. The Public Archives Canada defended itself by arguing that most records have to be destroyed for reasons of space and that the destruction of these papers had been properly considered, authorized and documented. Moreover, a statistically significant sample of the files had been saved from destruction to provide evidence of processes and procedures and daily operations.

The Public Archives of Canada undertook a well-orchestrated publicity campaign to defend its position; in doing so, it was concerned that bad publicity might damage the new Archives Bill which was going through the Canadian Parliament. Not everybody was satisfied, however; David Matas, a human rights lawyer and Jewish advocate, was deeply unhappy with the decision and criticized the official record retention and destruction policies which, he said, mirrored the government's apathy when it came to banishing war criminals from the country. To concerns that it would have been hugely expensive to store this vast accumulation of paper, Matas said that the files could have been microfilmed as the Americans had done with their equivalent files. Cook noted that Matas had underlined the politicized and controversial nature of appraisal and the related destruction of records and how accountability and public policy can be thwarted by action (or inaction) by records managers and archivists. He also made the point that every record created has some potential use to someone and no one can predict all the possible uses decades after creation. The public furor over the destruction of these files led to major changes at the Public Archives of Canada; procedures and documentation were tightened up and a new and more sensitive appraisal concept called 'macroappraisal' was introduced. This finds value through a functional analysis of society, its major institutions and the interaction of citizens with those institutions.

There are examples from many countries of archives being destroyed (or allegedly destroyed) to protect well known people, including sporting heroes. According to Douglas Booth (2006), the Australian swimmer and triple Olympic gold medal winner, Dawn Frazer was banned for ten years by the Australian Swimming Union in 1965 following a report by Bill Slade, manager of the Australian swimming team at the Tokyo Olympics. Quite why Frazer was banned after Tokyo is not in the public domain and Slade's report, which is in the archives of the Australian Olympic Committee, has been mutilated and all references to her behaviour in Tokyo deleted.

The British royal family may also have engaged in acts of destruction, starting with Princess Beatrice, the youngest daughter of Queen Victoria, who edited her mother's journal, censoring and cutting as she went, and destroyed the originals (Ward, 2014, 10). The Royal Archives is keen to stress that this was done, 'at Queen Victoria's own request' after the monarch's death in 1901 (see Queen Victoria's Journals website). According to William Shawcross's official biography of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, her daughter Princess Margaret had looked through her mother's archives and destroyed a lot of potentially sensitive material. According to a journalist writing for the *Daily Telegraph*:

Shawcross's book contains the first confirmation that letters from the Princess of Wales were among the material destroyed. He writes: 'Princess Margaret was engaged on one of her periodic "sortings" of her mother's papers.' In a letter to her mother, who was staying at Birkhall on the Balmoral estate, the Princess wrote: 'I am going back today to clear up some more of your room. Keeping the letters for you to sort later.' Shawcross writes: 'On the Princess's orders, large black bags of papers were taken away for destruction rather than for ultimate consignment to the Royal Archives. There is no record of just what was thus lost but Princess Margaret later told Lady Penn . . . that among the papers she had destroyed were letters from the Princess of Wales to Queen Elizabeth - because they were so private, she said. No doubt Princess Margaret felt that she was protecting her mother and other members of the family. It was understandable, although regrettable from a historical viewpoint.' (Rayner, 2009)

One of the most notorious cases of alleged destruction is the so-called Shreddergate, the Australian Heiner affair. In 1989, a former magistrate, Noel Heiner, was asked to conduct an inquiry into complaints by the staff of the

John Oxley Youth Detention Centre in Queensland. The complaints centred round the management style of the relatively new director of the centre. The inquiry was begun in the final days of Russell Cooper's National Party government in 1989. Following the General Election and the change of government, Heiner's inquiry was wound up. However, the director of the centre, Peter Coyne, apparently believed that the documents produced by Heiner contained allegations against him. He asked to see them, but was not allowed to do so. The Queensland government was apparently concerned that the documents might be used as the basis of a defamation claim by Coyne and that the way the Heiner inquiry had been set up did not provide Heiner or his informants with indemnity against such an action. The Queensland Cabinet agreed that the remaining papers of the Heiner report should be destroyed. The approval of the State Archivist was obtained within a period of 24 hours and the documents were shredded (Hurley, 2002). The decision to shred the documents was very controversial. Some people have alleged that they were destroyed in order to cover up sexual abuse at the Detention Centre. There has been a vociferous campaign, led by former union official Kevin Lindeberg, for an inquiry into the destruction of the records. According to one writer, quoted by Australian archivist Chris Hurley, 'After the election, it became apparent that the allegations revealed details of inmate abuse that, if disclosed, would reflect unfavourably not only upon the beleaguered Coyne (and the government that had employed him), but also on the staff who participated in the abuse, the union to which they belonged, and the responsible department' (Hurley, 2002, 312).

However, the problem with destroying documents is that their content remains if not unknowable, very hard to discover and so speculation can rapidly gain the force of established truth. In 2013, lawyer Tim Carmody (State of Queensland, 2013) conducted an inquiry into the matter. He found that, while there had been an incident of alleged sexual misconduct by inmates of the Centre, this had been fully investigated at the time with police involvement. His investigation mainly focused on the decision by the Queensland Cabinet to destroy the Heiner records. He said that on the question of whether there was any evidence suggesting that the Cabinet decision to destroy the records was a response of, or action taken by, the executive government in relation to child sexual abuse allegations, there was no factual basis logically supporting a reasonable suspicion or rational belief. He added that 'Speculation or suggestions to the contrary are

scandalous, disingenuous and groundless'. Carmody also looked at the legal question of whether the Cabinet had acted appropriately in authorizing the destruction of the records (State of Queensland, 2013, 8). In his report, he said: 'Even if it is properly characterised as the honest but ill-advised act of a newly-elected government, Cabinet Decision No. 162 of 1990 caused the destruction of public records which from a governance and public administration perspective fell short of the relevant standard of appropriateness; that is, "fit and proper"'.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed many varied reasons for the silences that are to be found in archives. Some are historic - records were destroyed or partially lost before the arrival of effective records management systems. Some are political - records are destroyed or retained to please one group or another. And some relate to the changing nature of archival institutions over nearly 200 years. Until the 1970s and perhaps later in some cases, collecting policies favoured the acquisition of records that reflected the perspectives of governments or of rich and powerful organizations, families and individuals. Only from the 1970s has there been a genuine desire at most archival institutions to reflect wider aspects of the society outside the reading room door, by interacting with groups which do not traditionally use the archive.

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