

Resources

*The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau: Preserving and Disseminating
Pacific Documentation*

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The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau: Preserving and Disseminating Pacific Documentation

The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PMB) is one of very few long-term archival projects in the world based on international cooperation. For twenty-seven years it has responded to the twin imperatives of academic research requirements and the need to preserve the documentary cultural heritage of the Pacific Islands. The bureau is small in scale: one room, one camera, one officer; a cork in an ocean of Pacific archives. Known affectionately as Pambu, the bureau has a strong reputation, a resilience born of the necessity of its task, and an enormous amount of support.

With minimal resources and independent funding, the bureau responds constructively to Pacific documentary preservation needs by making microfilm copies of Pacific archives. The survey and arrangement of the archives and manuscripts for microfilming provides archival expertise (a scarce resource in the Pacific), which helps to keep the original records in good order, while the microfilms themselves provide security against their loss. The microfilms, which are distributed widely by subscription and direct sales, also provide valuable sources for academic research, especially when access to the originals, if they survive, can be difficult and expensive.

HISTORY AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The bureau was established as a part of the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University in 1968. The prime mover behind it was Harry Maude, Pacific scholar and erstwhile British colonial administrator in what was then the Gilbert Islands (now part of Kiribati). Maude, now a sprightly ninety-year-old living in Canberra, still takes an active interest in the bureau's work. For many years he had been acutely conscious of the continuing loss of documentary material on the Pacific Islands. He felt that Pacific rim academics and librarians had a responsibility to reverse this trend, not just to satisfy their own interests and needs, but also to ensure that Pacific Islanders themselves could have ongoing access to records of their cultural and intellectual heritage.

In December 1962 Maude discussed the possibility of interlibrary cooperation over the copying and distribution of Pacific documentation with Dr Floyd Cammack, then assistant librarian at the University of Hawai'i. Dr Cammack wrote to Pacific research libraries proposing a conference to form such an association. The idea interested Gordon Richardson, who was both principal librarian of the Public (now State) Library of New South Wales and Mitchell librarian. He wrote to Cammack suggesting the pos-

sibility of forming an association that could “undertake the central organisation and control of a Joint Copying Project for research materials for the Pacific region” (Langdon 1973, 42).

Nothing happened immediately, because Cammack left Hawai‘i, but the idea was revived at a meeting in Sydney in November 1966 between Richardson and Dr Ralph Shaw, dean of library services at the University of Hawai‘i. The upshot was that Richardson asked Maude to prepare a report on what might be done. Called “The Documentary Basis for Pacific Studies: A Report on Progress and Desiderata,” it was released in March 1967 (Maude 1967). The report recommended cooperative measures for achieving completeness in library holdings of published works on the Pacific Islands and the provision of adequate bibliographies and indexes to these publications. It also recommended the establishment of a clearing center for the location, recording, copying, and depositing (in either original or microfilm form) of significant unpublished material relating to the islands.

An agreement was subsequently reached between the Australian National University’s Research School of Pacific Studies and four of the main Pacific research libraries in the United States, New Zealand, and Australia—the library of the University of Hawai‘i, the Mitchell Library, and the national libraries of New Zealand and Australia—to jointly subsidize the establishment and operation of a Pacific Manuscripts Bureau.

The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau opened for business in April 1968. Its first executive officer was Robert

Langdon, who had formerly been assistant editor of *Pacific Islands Monthly*. For the next eighteen years Langdon energetically sought out and microfilmed a large quantity of significant manuscript and rare printed material, much of which was at risk of loss or destruction. Copies of these films were lodged in each of the bureau’s participating libraries and sold to other libraries and individuals. The material copied includes personal papers such as diaries and correspondence, mission records, records of governments and colonial administrations, logs of whaling vessels, and some company records. Perhaps inevitably, given the nature of historical Pacific Islands documentation, the records copied were mostly those that documented the European presence in the islands.

During Langdon’s tenure, the bureau’s searching and filming activities were mainly concentrated on records held in the islands because they were considered to be at greatest risk of loss through tropical climatic conditions and the lack of adequate repositories and trained staff to care for them. The bureau has always considered itself a preservation microfilming program as well as a clearing center for improved documentation of and access to sources.

Maude had envisaged the bureau making a systematic collection of manuscripts relating to the Pacific Islands from every one of the principal repositories in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Chile, and Peru. His aim was “to have every manuscript of significance for research available in original or copy; and not only available,

but made known to everyone who may require to consult it through the compilation and publication of adequate finders' aids" (Maude 1973, 20). While this encyclopedic vision was beyond the capacity of the bureau, some notable successes were achieved. Langdon coordinated the New England Microfilming Project, which located, filmed, and indexed many hundreds of Yankee-Pacific whaling logs in North American repositories (Langdon 1978; 1984). The bureau also filmed Marist Oceania Province documents at the Archivio Padri Maristi in Rome, papers relating to Garcia Jofre de Loaisa's expedition to the Pacific, 1526–1536, at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, and Methodist Church papers on Solomon Islands missions held in Auckland.

Langdon edited and published a number of indexes to the documents filmed by the bureau and oversaw the compilation of a major in-house index to Pacific Island manuscripts. Since its inception, the bureau's activities have been publicized in its newsletter *Pambu*, which in recent years has been published twice a year. The newsletter has always included detailed descriptions of the material filmed.

When Langdon retired in 1986, the bureau was a thriving and well-respected microfilming venture. Following his retirement, the bureau's financial arrangements were completely reconstituted. During Langdon's tenure the Research School of Pacific Studies paid the executive officer's salary, while the member-library subscriptions and profits from sales of film provided the funds for administration, travel, and filming

costs. When Langdon retired, the research school announced it would no longer pay the executive officer's salary. As a result, member-library subscriptions were doubled and the Australian National University Library became a formal member of the bureau, in partial recompense for the loss of the research school's contribution. The addition of that library to the membership fold was negated by the withdrawal of the State Library of Victoria, which had been a member library since the early 1970s and had balked at the one-hundred-percent increase in the annual subscription. Fortunately, the other recent addition to the bureau's membership consortium, the library of the University of California at San Diego, maintained its commitment to the bureau and absorbed the increased membership fee. The effect of this reconstitution of the bureau was that it has been, until only recently, hamstrung by a lack of adequate funds.

Since the reconstitution, the bureau's affairs have been in the hands of a management committee. Geographical imperatives have given the Australian members a leading, but by no means exclusive, role in the committee's discussions and decision making. The Research School of Pacific Studies continued to provide an intellectual and administrative base for the bureau's operations. Dr Niel Gunson chaired the committee from 1987 till 1993. He was supported by other staff from the research school, including Dr Dorothy Shineberg, Mr Peter Grimshaw, Dr Darrell Tryon, Professor Hank Nelson, Dr Stephen Henningham, and Professor Donald Denoon,

who all served on the management committee from time to time. Informal connections with many Pacific scholars and research students in the school, its internet systems, and seminars have been and still are a great stimulus to the discovery of Pacific archival sources for microfilming.

Successive directors of Australian Studies at the National Library of Australia maintained a continuing high level of managerial and practical interest in the bureau's activities. John Thompson took a personal role in the establishment and running of the reconstituted bureau. The National Library's Manuscript Librarian Graeme Powell currently brings his enormous experience, including nine years as manager of the Australian Joint Copying Project, to the running of the bureau. Mitchell librarians, particularly Margy Burn, have taken a strong interest in the bureau's activities.

Langdon's successors, Bess Flores (1987–1989) and Gillian Scott (1989–1993), kept the bureau active in the face of its funding shortfall, but much to the concern of the remaining members, the bureau's output of microfilm reels fell away. Despite this, some important advances were made during those seven years. Bess Flores initiated a consolidation of the bureau's "information sheets" on microfilmed records (Flores 1989). The result was publication of the complete annotated catalogues of the bureau's manuscript and printed document series microfilms, which for the first time listed and indexed the entire output of the bureau in two convenient volumes (Scott 1991; Flores 1991). Later, the

National Library of Australia created catalogue entries for each PMB title on the Australian Bibliographic Network and an online version of the complete annotated catalogue was mounted on a WAIS database via the Australian National University's Coombs Internet server. Gillian Scott completed the editorial work on the manuscripts catalogue and compiled a guide to the bureau's microfilms relating to women in the Pacific (Scott 1992).

The bureau's difficulties came to a head with the resignation of Gillian Scott in late 1993. This had followed a period of considerable debate within the management committee over the direction of the bureau. An arrangement was made with the National Library of Australia to second one of its officers, Adrian Cunningham, to the position of executive officer for one year from January 1994, and Dr Brij Lal was appointed the new chair of the management committee. Lal's vigor and passion for contemporary Pacific history and politics, as well as his determination to break new ground, are well known.

Cunningham's brief was to investigate and pursue possible sources of additional funding and to see through to completion existing filming commitments. Completing these projects and pushing through new ones meant that the number of reels produced increased. At the same time he raised the profile of the bureau in as many spheres as possible. In particular, this involved getting to know as many Pacific scholars as he could, by attending their meetings and conferences and seizing every opportunity to talk to them about the work of the bureau. He

also embarked on a membership drive, which resulted in the library of the University of Auckland becoming a member in 1995, increasing the size of the bureau's membership consortium from six to seven. In addition, the bureau received a number of very large sales orders from libraries that, although not inclined to become members, were sufficiently interested in the work of the bureau to place orders for large runs of its titles. These developments have helped resolve the bureau's financial difficulties for the foreseeable future, giving it a sound financial base for the pursuit of its mission.

Apart from raising funds and producing reels of microfilm, Lal and Cunningham combined to develop some significant shifts of emphasis in the work of the bureau. One of these was to return to the Langdon-era practice of active filming and surveying trips around the islands. The member libraries felt that the bureau's emphasis had shifted away from locating and preserving at-risk records in the islands. In addition, they were keen to broaden the variety of bureau titles to include material that would be of interest to a wider variety of academic disciplines, as well as material that is more contemporary in nature. Their intention was also to shift the current emphasis of the bureau's catalogue by filming more records created by Islanders themselves, including material in vernacular languages. The bureau's catalogue of titles now includes a preponderance of nineteenth-century mission records and whaling logs. Although these are unquestionably vital research sources, it was considered that a lot of twentieth-century records need to be pre-

served soon, before they disappear. These include records of businesses, trade unions, nongovernment organizations and dissident groups. In line with this policy the bureau began projects to locate and film records documenting the Fiji coups of 1987 and the current crisis in Bougainville. Ewan Maidment's report on his 1994 survey of Pacific Island trade union records also pointed to a number of potential filming projects of extremely vulnerable and significant records (Maidment 1995).

Member support for the bureau is always contingent on its producing an adequate number of microfilms as a return on the members' investments. The bureau has produced over 2000 reels of microfilm since 1968 and is continuing to make microfilms at an increasing rate. Its annual output of film in 1994 and 1995 was substantially greater than in any of the previous ten years. Much of the credit for this is due to Gillian Scott, who had taken to heart the concerns of the member libraries about falling output. Of the 90 reels released in 1994, 60 consisted of reels filmed for the bureau in the Cook Islands in 1993 by Bill Coppell—the first time since the Langdon era that the bureau had conducted a major filming project in the islands. Although this was a pleasing outcome, the Cook Islands microfilms had a number of technical and documentation inadequacies. As a result of this experience and of other attempts to rely on third parties to do fieldwork for the bureau, the policy has been determined that all field trips in future should be conducted by the executive officer.

In line with this policy, Cunningham

carried out one field trip in 1994, which involved a three-week trip to Suva with the primary intention of filming the manuscript holdings of the Pacific Theological College Library. With the cooperation of College Librarian Jeanette Little, he filmed 17 reels of manuscripts consisting of the papers of Fijian Methodist leader Setareki Tuilovoni; the papers of London Missionary Society missionary George Herbert Eastman in Samoa and the Gilbert Islands; the papers of Hilda Steadman, who was the wife of a Methodist missionary and worked with the Fiji Indian community between 1912 and 1940; and the rare Pacific pamphlet collection of the Reverend Cecil Gribble. While in Fiji Cunningham was also able to identify and appraise possible future filming projects and initiate discussions aimed at securing permission to film the records in question.

Other major film releases in 1994 included the papers of German Pacific linguist Otto Dempwolff, the originals of which are in Hamburg; the papers of Tongan traditions expert Tupou Posesi Fanua; and a number of smaller manuscripts relating to Papua New Guinea.

CURRENT AND FUTURE OPERATIONS

In 1995 Ewan Maidment, who was appointed executive officer following Cunningham's return to the National Library of Australia, continued the bureau's reinvigorated microfilming activities in the islands. Field trips, each of about three weeks, to Pape'ete, Suva, and Nuku'alofa produced 86

reels of film and provided an opportunity to arrange future microfilming programs, including the archives of the Fiji Labour Party, the Catholic Diocese of the Marquesas Islands, and the Methodist Church in Fiji.

In Pape'ete, Maidment and his colleague Barry Howarth filmed about half the archives and manuscripts of the Archdiocese of Pape'ete. The strongest series in the administration archives microfilmed so far are the apostolic delegates' correspondence files, 1919–1969; the papers of Monseigneur Jaussen, including his papers on Tahitian botany; the papers of Monseigneur Mazé, including his vast output of sermons; the extraordinarily systematic and detailed Parish reports and correspondence, most of which cover the period since 1920; and the correspondence of the missionaries.

The manuscripts include the following: Frère Martin Darque and Père Fournier on their early activities in Tahiti; Père Fierens on the conversion of Napuka; Père Albert Moniton on Tuamotu traditions; Père Fouqué on the conversion of the Tuamotus; Josepha Teuho a Tepage on the history and legends of the Tuamotus; Désiré Maigret's journal from the Gambiers, 1834–1840; Abbé Tryphon Putairi's histories of Mangareva, together with a possibly related history of Mangareva; Monseigneur Jaussen and Père Zuhmbohm on Easter Island; the manuscript of Ribourt's Māori-French dictionary compiled in the 1840s; Jaussen's and other Tuamotu vocabularies; and an Arorai vocabulary. A history of the Picpus Order in Polynesia, published as four separate pamphlets between 1964 and 1968, was also copied in this series.

In Suva the bureau filmed 300 Bachelor of Divinity theses produced by students of the Pacific Theological College during the period 1968 to 1982. Many of these involve the systematic application of detailed local knowledge to topics covering a broad range of cultural, social, and political matters in the islands. They are a major scholarly resource, and access to them through the microfilms will contribute to wider recognition of indigenous scholarship in the Pacific Islands.

The further week in Suva was spent filming selected records from the Fiji Trades Union Congress archives, which survived the fire bombing of the congress's building during the coups, including conference papers, 1962–1991; executive committee minutes and related papers, 1966–1991 (incomplete); management board minutes and related papers, 1974–1991 (gaps), and official directories, 1979–1991. Selected general files were also filmed, including documentation of the formation of the Fiji Labour Party, of the imposition of trade bans following the first coup in May 1987, and of the second coup and subsequent developments, July 1987 to January 1988.

In Nuku'alofa, at the request of the Tongan Ministry of Justice, the bureau filmed records of the Supreme Court, the Land Court, and Courts of Appeal, including registers from 1905; Land Court minute books, 1923–1940; Land Court case files from 1947; and miscellaneous judgments from all courts. Two lost Tonga Government letterbooks, May 1873 to November 1874, and June 1880 to June 1883, both holding outward correspondence

by Shirley Baker, were located in the Justice Archives and filmed.

The bureau's microfilming programs based in Australia continued. The second part of the joint project with the Mitchell Library to microfilm archives of the Methodist Overseas Mission (36 reels) was completed, and filming of the archives of the Fiji Independent News Service continued in the bureau's office. These, together with sundry printed items for the Document Series, produced approximately 50 reels for distribution in 1995.

Guiding this strategy is the bureau's strategic plan, 1995–1997, which set major surveying and microfilming projects in the Solomon Islands in 1995 and in Vanuatu in 1997. The operational strategy of the bureau has had two arms: first, to maintain a high rate of production, and second, to strike a balance of church and missionary archives with those of other contemporary Pacific nongovernment organizations. Achieving the second is a slower process because it involves a period of transition, but the filming of the Fiji Trades Union Congress and Fiji Independent News Service archives is a useful first step.

MOMENTUM AND BALANCE

The bureau is a minimalist organization: a barefoot doctor. It relies on goodwill, good contacts, resourcefulness, and the demand for its resources. A bicycle rather than a truck, the bureau needs balance and it needs momentum to maintain its balance. Microfilming older at-risk records is its moving force. However, it has devel-

oped new microfilming programs aimed at the archives of contemporary Pacific organizations: records documenting the cultural and political aspirations of the independent island states, and those relating to current economic and political issues affecting the islands. The impetus of these new programs, their responsiveness to Pacific and academic needs, will enable the bureau to maintain a steady momentum.

The bureau's new microfilming programs are aimed at documenting contemporary Pacific communities and issues. Records relating to the coups in Fiji, to the crisis in Bougainville, and to Pacific trade unions have been targeted for immediate filming. Other proposed projects include records relating to the mining industry, particularly in Melanesia, archives of environmental and antinuclear groups, women's organizations, employer organizations, and businesses.

There are difficulties, particularly in relation to confidentiality and copyright, but they are not insurmountable. The advantage of microfilm as a means of preservation is that the records are not carted away by the truckload, as Fabian Hutchinson put it (Hutchinson and Wraith 1993, 29). Rather than disempowering an organization by removing its records to a remote repository and thereby divorcing it from its history, arranging and describing records for filming brings order to an organization's archives, recognizes their inherent value, adds value to them by making them accessible, and in the process empowers the producing organization.

The bureau's new orientation

toward contemporary material is not exclusive, but is balanced by parallel programs aimed at locating and microfilming older material. Programs initiated in Gillian Scott's time or earlier are being continued and completed. For example, the bureau has three Eastern Pacific Catholic Church projects that complement the 400 microfilms of Oceania Marist Province archives of the Western Pacific produced in the mid 1980s: Bill Coppell's 50 microfilms of the Rarotongan Catholic Diocesan Archives were released by the bureau in 1994; a major project, which will produce about 70 microfilms of the archives and manuscripts held by the Catholic Archdiocese of Pape'ete, is due for completion in 1996; and there are good prospects of microfilming of the Catholic Diocesan archives in the Marquesas Islands in 1997.

The archives of the Western Pacific High Commission and the New Hebrides British Service, stored by the Foreign Office in the United Kingdom, and the fragile archives of the Methodist Church in Fiji, held at the National Archives of Fiji, have also been identified as new projects.

Balancing the bureau's programs includes meeting the members' various acquisitions requirements. For example, the Alexander Turnbull Library at the National Library of New Zealand has a specific interest in the Cook Islands, Western Samoa, and Niue. On the other hand, Kathy Creely of the Melanesian Studies Research Center, University of California, San Diego, sees Melanesian material as a priority for her institution.

A balanced microfilming program

will allow for the movement of archival material from the Pacific rim to the islands. This requires both a focus on records of the colonial powers and the participation of Pacific institutions. For example, the letterbooks of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR), held at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University, are very fragile and would be well worth preserving on microfilm. At the same time, the University of the South Pacific has expressed an interest in having access to CSR archives relating to its Fijian interests. Wider involvement in the bureau's activities of Pacific institutions such as the French University of the Pacific, the National Library of Papua New Guinea, and the University of Papua New Guinea are crucial to the success of such a program.

If the rationale, support, and structure of the bureau are sound, if it has an energetic, useful, and balanced microfilming program, then the remaining factor in considering the success of its operations is the implementation of its program. To make microfilms in the field, the bureau can use either contractual camera operators or its own executive officer to operate the camera. Contracting options in the Pacific are very limited and, where they exist, expensive or unreliable. The bulk of the immediate filming in the Pacific will have to be done by the executive officer.

In the longer term the possibility exists of deploying a second camera to which the bureau has access, by training and accrediting camera operators in the Pacific, possibly with aid funding to support the training process.

Microfilming for archival preservation was well established by the British in the Pacific. Institutions such as the National Archives of Fiji and the Solomon Islands National Archives have microfilming equipment and experienced operators, but their microfilming programs appear to be dormant. This is not a reflection of inappropriate technology, as the very energetic microfilm programs of the National Archives of Malaysia have demonstrated their applicability to archives in tropical conditions (Nor 1995). It may be that the bureau can collaborate with such organizations on projects that will reinvigorate their microfilming programs, just as the Melanesian Studies Research Center has done with the Papua New Guinea National Archives over filming patrol reports.

In any case, a closer association between the bureau, Pacific archival agencies, and established aid organizations is now a necessity. The Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council of Archives has just appointed a representative to the bureau's management committee. The bureau's current and proposed programs in French Polynesia, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands are being carried out in close cooperation with the archival authorities in those countries. The bureau has become a member of the Australian Preservation and Conservation Abroad Group. It is exploring the possibility of securing funding from UNESCO and Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade programs for archival preservation, specifically for its Vanuatu project in 1997.

Without the Pacific Manuscripts

Bureau's microfilming programs, many significant records relating to the Pacific would neither survive nor be accessible. Microfilming gives strength to the bureau to the extent that its programs have commercial viability. That viability is dependent on academic demand for its products and there being a sufficient level of production.

The shift to filming contemporary material will help maintain research demand for the bureau's products. Maintaining a high production level is more difficult given the bureau's limited resources. Nevertheless it is meeting the required level of production. It is possible that access to supplementary funding, by locking into the established preservation and conservation network, will help it to increase its coverage and output.

The continued support of the bureau's members is an essential factor in its survival. At a personal level, a high level of cooperation between professionals has already been established and will continue to mature. If a high level of institutional cooperation can be maintained and developed within Australia and internationally, then the bureau's programs will continue to be of significant benefit to the region.

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THIS PAPER is based on talks given by the authors to the Asia Pacific Special Interest Group of the Library and Information Association at the National Library of Australia, Canberra, 19 May 1995. Separate reports

of those talks appeared in *Australian Academic & Research Libraries* 26(4): 237-242; 243-247. December 1995.

Notes

1 Woodhouse and Tryon 1984; Langdon 1988a; 1988b. The Australian Joint Copying Project, during its forty-five-year history, microfilmed a large number of Pacific manuscripts in the United Kingdom, many of which had been identified and described by Phyllis Mander-Jones during the 1960s (Mander-Jones 1972).

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