

Notes

THE RESEARCHER'S COURTESY CODE

AT A RECENT research seminar for Waikato University postgraduate history students, a paper was given concerning problems of research in New Zealand. Preparation for that paper had included writing to archivists and reference librarians around the country, asking them to compile a list of major and minor irritations which could easily be avoided if students were better prepared before they visited libraries and research institutions. The Researcher's Courtesy Code has been devised in the light of those responses.

BEFORE YOU CONTACT ANY RESEARCH INSTITUTION:

1. **Make exhaustive use of all relevant reference tools available in your University Library**

- (a) **Bibliographical aids**
 - New Zealand National Bibliography to the year 1960*, edited by A. G. Bagnall
 - Index to New Zealand Periodicals*
 - Archives New Zealand*
 - Union List of Serials* (now *The Finding List*)
 - Union List of Newspapers*
 - National Register of Archives and Manuscripts*
 - Turnbull Library Record*, 'Notes of Manuscripts'
 - Archifacts*, 'Accessions'
- (b) **Biographical aids**
 - Who's Who in New Zealand*
 - New Zealand Dictionary of Biography*
 - Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*
 - New Zealand Parliamentary Records*
- (c) **Official publications**
 - British Parliamentary Papers relating to New Zealand*
 - Journals and Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives and the Legislative Council*

Parliamentary Debates
New Zealand Gazette
New Zealand Statutes
New Zealand Statutory Regulations
New Zealand Yearbooks
New Zealand Statistics

You should consult Frank Rogers, *Archives New Zealand*, Auckland, 1985, to ensure that you have located *all* the institutions at which there may be material of use to you.

2. Select and define your topic closely

This must be done in consultation with your supervisor. Make sure that he/she knows that sources are available and adequate. Preliminary work on the framework of the topic, defining its limits, breaking it into its components and clarifying the approach to be used, is all necessary before you begin to consult with librarians and archivists.

3. Background

Work through the available range of relevant secondary sources before you begin looking at primary materials elsewhere. Otherwise you may miss the significance of some points in your documents.

PLANNING A RESEARCH TRIP

4. Adequate advance notice is essential

A letter *must* be sent at least *ten working days* in advance. Content should include:

- (a) a description of the proposed research topic;
- (b) an outline of the particular sources you hope to use;
- (c) expected time of arrival and length of stay;
- (d) a list of material already perused (to save unnecessary duplication of effort by reference staff);
- (e) an indication as to whether you are planning an initial exploratory visit or a major research trip;
- (f) a covering letter from your supervisor or head of department;
- (g) an additional A4 sheet of paper, headed with your name, address, and research topic. Staff can then use this when processing your request.

Such advance notice:

- (a) enables archivists and reference librarians to do some preliminary assemblage;
- (b) ensures that a staff member with expertise in your area will be on hand when you arrive;
- (c) enables prior clearance of restricted material, e.g. literary papers, trade union material, papers of recent politicians, government archives relating to foreign affairs, defence, police and justice.
- (d) prevents a fruitless visit since reference staff have time to advise you that material is lacking.

NB. Researchers often seriously underestimate the time required to read handwritten manuscript etc. If you know that you can make only one visit, write several weeks in advance to ask for an assessment of the amount

of material available. You can then plan your research trip in accordance with the advice received.

ONCE AT THE RESEARCH INSTITUTION

5. Introduction to staff

Introduce yourself *on arrival*.

- (a) Obtain an interview with a senior staff member as soon as possible — *and keep it on time*.
- (b) Ask for advice on procedures and services, e.g. how the catalogue works, how to request a book or manuscript, how to have material held over for the next day. Check the policy on photo-copying. If wishing to work at National Archives on nineteenth century records, ask for an explanation of the system of government correspondence registration and indexes.
- (c) Give a detailed explanation of your topic, approach and scale of services that you hope to use.
- (d) Enquire about any special indexes and lists which may be of use, e.g. Turnbull's biographical index, the Hocken Library's Chronological list. Special collections will have their own catalogue. In the case of archives and manuscript collections, ask about 'series lists' and 'inventories'.

'If a student's interests are well known and the sympathy of librarians and archivists engaged, they will not only give the best of their own knowledge, but also enquire among their colleagues and keep an eye out on the student's behalf for other useful, out of the way sources that they may come across in future.'

(Comment from a Head Librarian)

6. Observe the procedures

- (a) Request slips must be completed fully, clearly and *accurately*.
- (b) Always take precise references and incorporate the archives' or library's system of coding into your own references right from the beginning.
- (c) Request only a reasonable quantity of material at any one time.
- (d) Plan your requests so that you are not sitting in the reading room with nothing to do. You will not be the only researcher for whom staff will be locating material.
- (e) Keep a record of documents requested. It is wasteful of everyone's time to request the same material twice.
- (f) Respect the rights of other researchers. Being from 'out of town' does *not* entitle you to special preferences.

7. Keep photocopying requests to the absolute minimum

- (a) Reference librarians and archivists are not employed as photocopiers and have to hold over normal work in order to do it.
- (b) Take detailed notes as you read and confine photocopying to a few choice items selected as part of the process of working through the sources.
- (c) Double-check the references if photocopying is requested and keep a record of the request (date, reference, pages, when received, cost) so that you can also keep an eye on your budget.
- (d) Permission will not be given for the photocopying of fragile materials. Respect the institution's policy.

8. Illustrative materials

- (a) Allow *two to three months at least* for photographic orders to be completed.
- (b) Order photos and other illustrations as you go along.
- (c) Keep *exact* references for these, otherwise you will experience major difficulties when trying to identify the illustrations.

9. Observe basic courtesies

- (a) Inform the archives or library staff when you are leaving so that they are not holding material over for you.
- (b) Verbal thanks for assistance should be followed by a letter to each of the research institutions in which you have worked.
- (c) Pass on your experiences to fellow students to prevent their making any of the same mistakes that you have done.

Key guides to which you should refer:

J. E. Traue, *New Zealand Studies: A Guide to Bibliographic Resources*, Wellington, 1985. (Available from Victoria University Press, \$4.20.)

G. A. Wood, *A Guide for Students of New Zealand History*, Dunedin, 1973.

Frank Rogers, *Archives New Zealand*, Auckland, 1985. (Details opening hours, addresses etc. of most of the archival repositories in New Zealand and the Pacific.)

University of Waikato Library: *Guide to reference material at Waikato University Library for students of New Zealand History*.

And see also Cheryl Campbell, 'Archivists and Historians: How Can We Assist Each Other?', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. XIX, No. 2, October 1985, pp. 151-163.

JEANINE GRAHAM

University of Waikato