

Colonial Secretary's correspondence 1859-1903

295	Shreff (continued)	
Dormitory letter from Secy of Gas Company re supply of gas to jail.		1683
Certificate of death of J. J. Griffin		1723
Griffin's Burial		1759
Warrant for employment of hard labor gangs		1878
Order supply of fuel labor re supply of food for Auckland at Dunedin		1915
Statement of expenses in connection with Griffin's execution -		1916
Re Construction of James Dunlop's quarters -		1987
Appoint of C. O'Brien, R. Starkie & G. Walker as Dunlop's		2016
Collection of rates for fuel increments at		2017
Recommendation regarding 3 months sentence of Capt. Cook & Cole -		2086
Mr. Sneyd (Clerk) desire to return from his service with a gratuity		2114
For authority to pay 15/3 to H. Horgan on his discharge from (Hobart on 10/1/1878)		2166
Inadvisable of Docking accommodation at Maryborough -		2238
Orders for making Carthage Chert at Rockhampton Jail		2289
Warrant for employment of hard labor prisoners		2290
Dismissal of Tomby Skell for allowing "Dunk" to be out of his cell during breakfast.		2299
Improvement of Jail at Maryborough -		2461
Warrant for employment of hard labor prisoners		2514
List of prisoners for remission of sentence under New Jail Regulations.		2536
Warrant for removal of prisoner from Brisbane to St. Helens		2683
Estimate for 1869 -		2723
Recommendation special gratuity to certain Dunlop's upon retirement		2763
Solemn applications for appointment of Governor of Bussell		2831

DR24623 - Index To Register Of Letters Received, 1868

Research Guide to the Colonial Secretary's
correspondence records 1859-1903
at Queensland State Archives

Queensland State Archives (QSA) is the official repository for Queensland Government records selected for permanent retention because of their continuing value. The archived public records are from state government departments, state courts, local government authorities and statutory authorities. The records are in our facility at [Runcorn, Brisbane](#), and open records are available for viewing in the Reading Room, free-of-charge.

This guide gives a brief history of the Colonial Secretary's Office (the name of the office was changed from Colonial Secretary to Home Secretary on 6 August 1896), including an explanation of its administrative procedures, a description of the series of records for correspondence from 1859–1903, and how to find letter numbers for the letters received in the Office.

The first Colonial Secretary, Robert George Wyndham Herbert, was appointed on 30 August 1859. He arrived in the colony to take up his duties on 10 December 1859 when Queensland separated from New South Wales. With the public reading of the proclamation by Sir George Ferguson Bowen's acting private secretary, Abram Moriarty, the territory described in the Letters Patent was established as the separate colony of Queensland.

In 1859 the Colonial Secretary's area of control was defined as, for all intents and purposes, all matters affecting the colony that were not the responsibility of the Colonial Treasurer or the Attorney-General. There were a large number of sub-departments under the control of the Colonial Secretary. Each had a degree of autonomy and was capable of creating and preserving their records. Each had an identifiable sub-departmental head, either an individual or a board, who was required to refer all major decisions, including monetary decisions to the Colonial Secretary.

Among the functions under the Colonial Secretary's control were education, defence, immigration, livestock, land, public works, law enforcement (including courts of summary jurisdiction presided over by police magistrates), the registration of births, deaths and marriages, communication, health and welfare, and miscellaneous matters including the botanic gardens and the meteorological observatory.

The main finding aid for records held at QSA is the [Queensland State Archives' online catalogue](#) (known as ArchivesSearch).

The following citation abbreviations are used throughout our catalogue:

- ITM – QSA Item (describes the item)
- PR – Physical Representation (generally the original or microfilm copy)
- DR – Digital Representation (for a digital image)
- S – Series ID (for series of records)
- A – Agency ID (for the creating or responsible agency).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that our catalogue contains images, names and voices of people who have died.

Letters received

The main series of records is S5253, the letters received, or in-letters, also known as inwards correspondence. Various registers, indexes, and special subsidiary series were developed from this series. Under-Secretary Moriarty made the following points while giving evidence on the duties of second-class clerks before a Select Committee on Government Departments:

“The duty of one is to keep a register of all documents coming into the Colonial Secretary's Office - to keep the records in fact. All documents are numbered and an abstract of their contents is entered in the register. These form a complete record of all correspondence in the office. I must state that if I had not thought the Colonial Secretary's office likely to extend in its operations, it is probable that there would not have been such a detailed system of record adopted. But I have endeavoured from the first to provide such a system as would be complete hereafter”.

There are three main interconnected series of records: indexes to registers of letters received, registers of letters received, and letters received.

Indexes to Registers of Letters Received

Circa 1/1/1861– Circa 31/12/1877

[S11933](#)

There are no indexes after 1877 because the registers became self-indexing. These indexes to registers are traditionally known as the COL/C series. Digital copies are available in [our catalogue](#). Try the steps in Appendix A to find digital copies of the *Indexes to Registers of Letters Received*.

Registers of Letters Received

15/12/1859–Circa 31/12/1896

[S11936](#)

These registers are traditionally known as the COL/B series. Digital copies are available in [our catalogue](#). Try the steps in Appendix A to find digital copies of the *Registers of Letters Received*.

Inwards Correspondence

12/10/1859–Circa 31/12/1903

[S5253](#)

These letters received or in-letters are traditionally known as the COL/A series. Digital copies are available in [our catalogue](#). Try the steps in Appendix A to find digital copies of the inwards correspondence.

Historical context

In-letters were registered and arranged by a method commonly known as the annual single number system, or when required, a top-numbering system. Each incoming letter was assigned the next available running number from the register of general correspondence. The last two figures of the year were prefixed to the number. For example, the 823rd letter received in 1876 was given the number 76/823. The entry in the register for the number 76/823 includes the date the letter was written, the date it was received (registered), the name or official position of the writer, an abstract of the letter's contents and a statement as to how it was dealt with. Out of this system developed the practice of grouping together items of inward correspondence for the same transaction. The method adopted was that of placing earlier letters under later ones, that is, ‘top-numbering’ the files. For more details about the practice of top numbering, refer to the [Research Guide to Top-numbering](#).

The use of this top-numbering file building method grew apace in the 1880s and 1890s and in many cases large, cumbersome files resulted. Searching the registers became more time-consuming. The only approach the clerk could use was to search the index for the period when correspondence on the transaction began to complete the file building, that is, until the clerk found an entry in the register showing that no subsequent related correspondence was received. Similarly, this presents quite a challenge to today's researchers who may have to search through many entries, which may extend over several years in many different registers.

Even when a researcher finds the correct number, according to the register, for the filing of correspondence, sometimes the letters themselves are not filed under that number. Some explanations for this are given below.

Batch files

The difficulty the filing clerks had in tracing entries through registers when the correspondence became extensive probably explains the creation of separate 'batches' for matters of major administrative concern. Correspondence was registered in the normal way, but the actual letters were placed in separate bundles. A series of special batches, S8400, was created described by subjects such as the annexation of New Guinea, Shearers' Strike 1891, Chinese immigration. Another practical reason for the creation of these special batches is the sheer, physical bulk of the special files. Although the annual single number system was breaking down, it is interesting to note that methods of registration did not change. A good proportion of the inward letters - on those transactions that were quickly completed - were both registered and filed by the old system for many years after the creation of the batches. This practice highlights some of the major limitations of the top numbering system.

After 1877 the registers became self-indexing. The letters were not entered in one numerical sequence but under a subject, similar to the earlier indexes. Letters from individuals are entered under the initial letter of the sender's surname. To follow the top numbered sequence may require searching several subject sequences. When new departments were created, earlier correspondence was sometimes relocated and registers were annotated accordingly. In 1897 a new Register of letters received (S12844) was created by the Home Secretary. Series [12844](#) covers the years 1897 to 1935. Letters were received from government officers, non-government individuals, and organisations.

COL/B - Annotated

The correspondence records of the Colonial Secretary's Office are possibly the more important historical series of records held by Queensland State Archives. However, finding letters in the inwards correspondence bundles often challenges researchers as any subsequent or top-numbered letters must be found to get the exact filing location.

To assist researchers with finding subsequent or top-numbered letters, the microfilmed registers from 1859 to 1896 were copied in paper format, and an on-going project of annotating these registers with the previous system identifier or bundle number for the individual letter numbers began.

In 2021, these COL/B – Annotated, Colonial Secretary's Office registers of inwards correspondence, were digitised and are available for researchers to search and view in our Reading Room under the *Selected QSA records* tile.

Related finding aids

- [Research Guide to Top-numbering](#)
- *The Colonial Secretary's Office 1859-1896, Departmental Guide*. This QSA guide is available on the Reading Room computers in the *Other Finding Aids by QSA* folder, under the *Finding Aids* tile.

Appendix A - Finding digitised records

Indexes to Registers of Letters Received

Circa 1/1/1861– Circa 31/12/1877

[S11933](#)

Digital copies of indexes (also known as COL/C) are in [ArchivesSearch](#). Try searching using these steps:

- Enter S11933 in *Search for*
- Limit to: Item
- Tick *Records with digital objects only*
- Limit to: [year] e.g., 1861 to 1861
- *Submit*

Registers of Letters Received

15/12/1859–Circa 31/12/1896

[S11936](#)

Digital copies of registers (also known as COL/B) are in [ArchivesSearch](#).

- Enter S11936 in *Search for*
- Limit to: Item
- Tick *Records with digital objects only*
- Limit to: [year] e.g., 1896 to 1896
- *Submit*

Inwards Correspondence

12/10/1859–Circa 31/12/1903

[S5253](#)

Digital copies of the inwards correspondence (also known as COL/A) are being added to our catalogue. One way to search our catalogue for the registers is by using these steps:

- Enter S5253 in *Search for*
- Limit to: Item
- Tick *Records with digital objects only*
- Limit to: [year] e.g., 1892 to 1892
- *Submit*

Quick search tip for finding in-letter bundles: To search for an exact COL/A number, e.g., COL/A31, use the *Search for picklist* to select *Previous System ID*.

Need more information?

Check our online catalogue [ArchivesSearch](#).
Phone us on (07) 3037 6777 or you can [email](#) an archivist.