

Top-numbering

62/1837 James Edwin Graham
Sidney, addi 18th July 1862

REGNO D'ITALIA.

Consolato d'Italia,

In Sidney.

Protocollo No. 33

No. 2

Registrata al No. 27

Oggetto.

Immigrazione

Sir,

I had the honor of
waiting upon you when I visited Brisbane in
January last, and your Excellency then very kindly
gave me some information and advice about a proposal
I made to introduce into Queensland Italian labor.

On my return here, I addressed myself to the Italian
Ministry on the subject, and by this mail I receive
answer, that the Government of Italy are willing to
admit and encourage emigration to our fine Colony,
conditional on receiving a guarantee that such
emigrants or those sending them shall receive the full
benefit of the Land order system.

DR6317, Letter from James Edwin Graham, Italian Consulate to
Sir George Bowen, Governor in Chief, Brisbane 18 July 1862

Research Guide to top-numbering 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.

It is necessary to understand top-numbering in order to use in-letter registers of general correspondence for public authorities, such as the Colonial Secretary's Office, Lands Department, Survey Office and Department of Works.

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:

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

How do letter numbers and in-letters registers work?

Many government agencies used an annual single number system to record and arrange their incoming correspondence. Each incoming letter was assigned the next available running number from the register of general correspondence, and the number was written on the front page of the letter. Generally, the number consisted of the last two digits of the year, and the next number. If a subsequent letter about the same matter was received, this letter was similarly numbered and before it was filed the previous correspondence was placed under the top-numbered letter.

Therefore, a register entry may include three sets of numbers about a letter:

- current number – this is the annual single number assigned to a particular letter; usually in the first column titled progressive
- top-number or subsequent – this is the number to follow to find the correspondence; usually in a column titled subsequent papers or in the remarks column
- previous number – this number indicates that there was earlier correspondence which is attached to this letter; usually in the column titled previous, former papers, or of papers.

In the example shown on the cover of this guide, a letter from James Edwin Graham of the Italian Consulate in Sydney, to Sir George Bowen, Governor in Chief in Brisbane was entered in the register as 62/1854 because it was the 1854th letter received in 1862.

The number was recorded in the register with a brief description and written on the letter (generally inside a departmental stamp). The letter was filed in the batch of letters. When the subsequent letter about the same subject was received, it was also assigned a unique number, for example, 66/517. Before the subsequent letter was filed, the previous letter (that is, 62/1854) was taken from its original filing place and was attached

under the subsequent letter number (66/517). The result was both letters filed together under the subsequent number, known as the top-number, 66/517.

Although correspondence was no longer filed at 62/1854, the register entry remained. To find 62/1854, the register entry was amended with the top-number, that is, 66/517 as the subsequent number.

In-letter registers are usually self-indexing with letters recorded under a specific subject heading. However, the original letter and the subsequent letter are not always in the same section of the register. In these instances, the subsequent number will usually include an abbreviation of the subject term under which the subsequent letter has been recorded which facilitates finding the correspondence.

When correspondence about a particular subject was ongoing, a letter could be top-numbered more than once. Then it is necessary to follow the top-numbering, often using more than one register across years, checking each subsequent number in the register until the final subsequent number.

What if the top-numbered letter is not filed in the correspondence bundle?

If the letter is not filed by the top-number it may:

- be in a subject batch – this is because although most general correspondence was registered and numbered by the annual single number system, special subject batches were created for inwards correspondence for matters of major administrative concern
- have been sent out 'under B/C' (under blank cover) from one department to another. A file sent under B/C will not be in the correspondence series of the sending department unless it was returned. It may be possible to use the in-letter registers of the receiving department to pick up the letter again, although the receiving department assigned a different top-number
- have been misfiled or lost by the originating department – when the entry in the register is annotated with Away, this means the letter was filed. However, not all correspondence survived to be transferred to Queensland State Archives.

Further information

Information and examples for referencing archival records held at QSA are available in the [Research Guide to citing and reproducing archival records](#).

Need more information?

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