

Colonial Secretary's correspondence 1859-1903

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Domestic Letter from Secy of Gas Company re supply of gas to Jail.		1683
Certificate of death of J. J. Griffin		1723
Griffin's Disposition		1789
Warrant for employment of hard labor gangs		1878
Query supply of fuel labor re supply of food for Quilby at Dumby		1915
Statement of expenses in connection with Griffin's execution		1916
Recommendation of James Dumby's quarters		1987
Report of C. O'Brien, R. Starkie & G. Walker as Dumby's		2016
Calculation of rate for Jail Incidentals		2017
Recommendation, suspension of 3 months of sentence of Sup ^d Cook & Cole		2086
Mr. Sneyd (Carler) desire to return from the service with a gratuity		2114
For authority to pay 15/3 to H. Heyman on his discharge from (Jail) on 16 th July		2166
Inadvisable of Cookup accommodation at Maryboro's		2238
Orders for making Carter's Chert at Rockhampton Jail		2289
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Promposal of Cooky Hill for allowing 'Cookup' to be out of his cell during breakfast		2299
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List of prisoners for removal of sentence under new Jail Regulations.		2536
Warrant for removal of prisoner from Brisbane to St. Helens		2683
Estimate for 1869.		2723
Recommendation special privilege to certain Dumby's upon retirement		2763
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Research Guide to the Colonial Secretary's
correspondence records 1859-1903
at Queensland State Archives

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.

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.

Letters received

The main series of records is the letters received or in-letters, also known as inwards correspondence, Series ID S5253. 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” on Land Selections available in our Reading Room.

There are three main series of records:

Indexes to Registers of Letters Received

Circa 1/1/1861– Circa 31/12/1877

Series ID [S11933](#)

These indexes to registers are traditionally known by researchers as the COL/C series. There are no indexes after 1877 because the registers became self-indexing

Registers of Letters Received

15/12/1859–Circa 31/12/1896

Series ID [S11936](#)

These registers are traditionally known by researchers as the COL/B series¹

Inwards Correspondence

12/10/1859–Circa 31/12/1903

Series ID [S5253](#)

These letters received or in-letters are traditionally known by researchers as the COL/A series. This is the main series of letters received by the Colonial Secretary's Office (later Home Secretary's Office). Letters were received from government officers, non-government individuals and organisations.

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, Series ID 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 which 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. of lease, payments made, transfers, changes of number - when the boundaries of Land Agents' Districts were changed and what happened to the selection, e.g. purchased, surrendered, forfeited, subdivided.

¹ In 1897 a new *Register of letters received*, Series ID S12844 was created by the Home Secretary. Series ID S12844 covered the years 1897 to 1935.

After 1877 the registers became self-indexing. The letters were not entered in one numerical sequence but were entered 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.

Other finding aids

- *The Colonial Secretary's Office 1859-1896, Departmental Guide*, a Queensland State Archives publication, available in the Reading Room
- *Research Guide to Top numbering*.

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