

REVIEW OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS (HMC)

BACKGROUND ON HMC

Role and duties

The Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC) was first appointed by Royal Warrant in 1869. The HMC's authority stems from, and its formal duties are as set out in the revised and enlarged Royal Warrant of 1959. Its terms of reference are:

- to make enquiry as to the existence and location of historical manuscripts, records or archives of all kinds, of value for the study of history, other than public records;
- with the consent of their owners or custodians to inspect and report upon them;
- to publish or assist the publication of such reports;
- to record particulars of such manuscripts and records in a National Register;
- to promote and assist their proper preservation and storage;
- to assist those wishing to use them for study or research;
- to advise upon general questions relating to their location, preservation and use;
- to promote the co-ordinated action of all professional and other bodies concerned with their preservation and use; and
- to carry out in place of the Public Record Office the statutory duties of the Master of the Rolls in respect of manorial and tithe documents.

Aims and objectives

HMC's overall **aim** is to protect and promote the rich archival resources outside the Public Records, on behalf of all the United Kingdom's citizens

To achieve this, HMC has set the following objectives:

- to discover and describe the archival sources of the United Kingdom's history, wherever they may be, maintaining accurate and up-to-date information about them and the conditions under which they may be consulted;
- to promote and champion ready access to these archives (wherever possible) for all who wish to consult them;
- to provide a central point of independent and authoritative advice on their care, preservation and rescue and on related issues of national, regional and local policy concerning archives;
- to improve the care and protection afforded to the nation's archives by promoting national standards and good practice;
- to ensure that as many people as possible are aware of their archival inheritance, and that they are encouraged to value and protect it and to use it for educational purposes, lifelong learning, or simply for enjoyment;
- to ensure that government and all other providers of funding for archive services whether national, regional or local or in the private sector, are fully informed about archives, and are aware not only of their administrative and evidential use but also of their value for our cultural life both now and in the long term. (From this awareness arise certain responsibilities to protect and preserve this inheritance for tomorrow's as well as today's citizens.)

DCMS objectives

HMC is sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The aim of the Department is:

"To improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, and to champion the creative and leisure industries."

The Department will:

- work to bring quality and excellence in the fields of culture, media and sport;
- make these available to the many, not just the few;
- raise the standards of cultural education and training;
- help to develop the jobs of the future in the creative industries.

The **objectives** of the Department are that, to achieve its aim, it will in partnership with others, work to:

- sustain and develop quality, innovation and good design; create an efficient and competitive market, including by removing unnecessary regulation and other obstacles to growth so as to develop the tourism and creative industries; and promote Britain's success in the fields of culture, media and sport at home and abroad;
- broaden access for all to a rich and varied cultural and sporting life and to our distinctive built environment; and encourage conservation of the best of the past;
- develop the educational potential of all the nation's cultural and sporting resources; raise standards of cultural education and training; ensure an adequate skills supply for the creative industries and tourism;
- ensure that everyone has the opportunity to develop talent and to achieve excellence in the areas of culture, media and sport;
- maintain public support for the National Lottery and ensure that the money used for good causes supports DCMS and other national priorities; and
- promote the role of the Department's sectors in urban and rural regeneration, in pursuing sustainability and in combating social exclusion.

In carrying out these objectives the Department will seek maximum value for money in using its human and financial resources, and in encouraging partnership with others.

HMC's functions

The HMC has received the following level of grant over the last five years:

1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01
£1m	£1.1m	£1m	£1.1m	£1.1m

The grant enables HMC to provide the following services:

Search room

The Commission has a search room at its offices in central London where it provides access, free of charge, to the National Register of Archives and the Manorial Documents Register, and introduces visiting groups of postgraduate students of archives administration and history to the sources of British history.

National Register of Archives (NRA)

The NRA indexes may be consulted free of charge at the HMC's search room and (24 hours a day) through its Web site (<http://www.hmc.gov.uk>).

ARCHON (Archives on-line)

ARCHON, accessed through HMC's website, is the Commission's gateway for UK archivists and users of archives. It provides information about, and direct electronic links to, British and a number of foreign archive repositories, as well as to other organisations actively involved in the promotion and preservation of, and access to, archives.

Manorial and tithe documents

The Commission has a specific statutory responsibility for the administration, on behalf of the Master of the Rolls, of the Rules governing Manorial and Tithe Documents. It maintains the Manorial Documents Register (MDR), a record of the whereabouts of manorial documents in England and Wales.

Inspections

The HMC offers record repositories and their governing bodies a free independent assessment of the extent to which they are achieving the HMC Standard for Record Repositories.

Standards and guidance

To supplement the British Standard for the storage and exhibition of archives in the UK (BS5454), the HMC, on behalf of the wider archival community, has published a Standard for Record Repositories which sets out good practice guidelines on various aspects of running a repository. HMC also produces advisory leaflets and information sheets.

Publications

The Commission has published reports on collections of manuscripts since its inception in 1869, including the Reports and Calendars series, the Prime Ministers' Papers series, Guides to sources of British history, and a number of technical publications. It also publishes in hard copy an *Annual review*, and a directory of *Record Repositories in Great Britain*, whilst a number of its recent publications are available only electronically over the HMC website. The Commissioners publish periodic Reports to the Crown, of which the most recent was *Archives at the Millennium* (1999).

Advice

The HMC provides expert and independent advice to owners, custodians, Government, grant-awarding bodies, professional associations, and researchers.

DETAILS ABOUT HOW YOU USE HMC'S SERVICES

Which of the following services provided by HMC do you, or the organisation on whose behalf you are making this response, use (please tick as many boxes as applicable):

HMC website as a means of access to:

- National Register of Archives
- contact and access information about record repositories
- archival bodies, projects etc via ARCHON
- electronic publications
- information about HMC itself

HMC publications (whether hard copy or electronic)

- texts, calendars and guides
- standards, technical publications
- leaflets, information sheets and advisory memoranda
- other

HMC search room services at Quality House

- personal visit
- telephone enquiry
- written enquiry (including fax/e-mail)
- group visit

Advice on/input to

- national policy
- regional policy
- strategy for your own archives
- standards
- plans for new archive buildings or equipment
- inspection/audit of existing buildings or services
- ICT
- notification of sales of manuscripts at auction or by private treaty
- potential sources of grant aid
- disposal of archives to a repository
- care of archives in situ
- [funding bodies] applications for grant aid
- other (please specify)

HMC representatives at your meetings/at joint consultative meetings

- at national level
- at regional level
- as trainers, speakers or instructors at seminars and conferences

Please tick the following box if you are a member of staff:

- as a member of staff

How regularly do you use these services?