

## **ABLative No.6, Spring 1987, pp 1-3 CSR Limited Records**

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### **Introduction**

CSR Limited is one of Australia's best known and largest companies. Founded in 1855 by Edward Knox as the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, it adopted its present name in 1973. It was formed from a reconstruction of the Australasian Sugar Company which (in 1842) had succeeded the Australian Sugar Company, the first company established in Australia for refining sugar. Today it continues its significant role in the Australian sugar industry operating mills and refineries, and, as agents for the Queensland government, the export marketing of all refined sugar from Australia.

Over the last 20 years the Company has diversified, incorporating rapid structural changes. In 1986 it included six divisions – corporate functions, Sugar Division, Building Materials, Aluminium Minerals & Chemicals, the Coal Division and the Oil & Gas Division. Since 1975 the Archives has held a collection for CSR Limited of the major correspondence and general record series which document its interests in sugar since 1847. Additions to the collection, with a few exceptions, which will be noted later, have been records relating to the sugar division. Records of other divisions and concerns are not documented in these archival holdings.

### **ACCESS TO RECORDS**

All records remain the property of CSR Limited. Access is restricted, requiring researchers to obtain advance permission before visiting the

Archives and submission before publication if records are cited. A few recent records are closed until a release date is established with the Company.

Researchers should note that not all the early series are complete and many nineteenth century records (notably press copy letter books) are extremely fragile. No photocopying of press copies is possible. While most of these letter books are indexed their use requires a considerable degree of painstaking endeavour to gain the very real rewards, which they can provide.

All material is listed in a final descriptive list or a summary box list. Because of the large volume of information we prefer potential users to write in advance with details of their particular area of interest. A search can then be made to identify likely record series and obtain the necessary approval for access.

Some reference queries can be answered by mail but extensive and interpretive research is not possible with current staff resources. Names of independent research assistants in Canberra can be supplied on request.

## **USE OF THE RECORDS**

The main intent of this paper is to illuminate some of the many series of records that make the CSR Limited collection of value for a wide range of research pursuits.

Both administrative and operational records are held in the collection which demonstrates involvement with

- the importation of sugar in the nineteenth century,
- the investigation of areas suitable for cane farming,
- experimental work in agriculture and chemical control of production,
- the export marketing of sugar
- the exploitation of technology particularly in bulk sugar handling
- and the development of
- mills and services in NSW, Queensland and Fiji,
- distillery works in Sydney and Melbourne, and
- branch offices and refineries in five capital cities and New Zealand.

To date over one hundred researchers have consulted the records in pursuits of such topics as

- the economics of the industry in Australia and Fiji,
- local and regional history studies in areas where refineries and mills are located
- identification of patterns of employment in the industry
- investment in the Pacific region,
- land use in Fiji,
- inland shipping in Australia
- the development of narrow gauge railways
- the photographic evidence of early Indian settlement in Fiji

- compiling illustrations for one of the Bicentennial history volumes
- biographical detail on company employees for the Australian Dictionary of Biography and family history researchers,
- research projects for undergraduate students in economic history (including one on the 10% wage cut in 1931) and
- scientific and chemical advances in Australia

Projects on early housing design for architectural research, the spread of Basque and Italian settlement in Australia, Indian women workers in Fiji and early agents for Chinese sugar sales have attracted students and academics from overseas. In addition, requests from the Company and CSR Limited employees doing research for themselves, have formed part of the usage.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE RECORDS

The most substantial and detailed series held are the earliest correspondence records of Head Office.

Bound inward letters and outward press copies comprise over 3,000 volumes arranged by title of the corresponding agency. Sets exist for each of the sugar mills, refineries, branches and agents, banks, shipping companies and industry associations.

In addition, they cover subject areas such as staff, private, Fiji cables, government sugar, raw sugar purchases, inspecting engineers, imports, mill inspectors etc. Gaps exist and few sets are complete. This correspondence covers mainly 1850-1947.

For the Australian Mills this correspondence is continued in hard copy, bound volumes from 1947-1978. The continuation of the other correspondence is on 737 spools of microfilm c1947-1972.

It is worth emphasising again that the use of the correspondence records (and indeed many of the other CSR Limited records) is not an easy task. Although many volumes are indexed, patient, persistent and detailed study is necessary. Such an approach will pay handsome dividends.

Records relating to employees take several forms. The Staff Out letter books in the correspondence series 1890-1911, 1920-1947 contain letters relating to staff placements and changes within the many offices, mills and refineries.

Other records show salaries paid, and the number and type of positions in various offices 1879-1909. Others in a ledger-like format trace individual careers c1882-1909, 1917-1958.

A series of Hours, Work and Wages Returns exist for all refineries, Queensland mills and some other installations, such as Pymont workshops and distillery. These papers have yet to be used for extensive research and provide a wealth of information for social and economic historians. They are half yearly returns with a large amount of data-names, classifications, occupations, covering award, date of birth, years of service, marital status, membership of a provident fund, allowances received,

company housing details leave etc. for all wage earning employees. They cover varying periods between 1882 and 1984.

A labour register for New South Wales, Queensland and Fiji mills, 1884-1950 identifies the extent of short term employment, largely for tradesmen's positions but also other workers, whose occupations are given.

Of significance in the collection is the large quantity of single photographs and albums c1870-1974. Albums were kept in sets for each mill and refinery, CSR Limited ships, engineering workshops, rolling stock, bulk sugar handling facilities plus several showing equipment and machinery for sugar factories overseas.

Pictures show the stages of development of buildings, fires, floods, installations of plan, construction work of bridges and railways, often the scenic details of a region, staff and workers, housing and recreational events such as shows, tennis and cricket matches.

For Fiji many photographs include employees and good pictorial evidence exists of the pineapple plantation and cannery operated there between 1938 and 1955.

Among the extensive operational record series for mills and refineries are:

- Price lists 1887-1951
- Sundry Data Mills and Refineries 1895-1942
- Sales & Delivery records. All Refineries 1915-1957
- Mill Statistics 1874-1929
- Mill Managers Reports 1926-1959
- Mill work Books 1870-1926 (gaps)
- Mill Manufacture Reports 1870-1983 (annual)
- General Reports on Cane 1916-1978 (annual)
- Refinery Reports 1919-1977 (various)
- Chemists Records 1855-1946 (various)
- Circulars to Mills c 1873-1954
- Plant Books 1909-1960
- Engineering Specifications Books 1891-1946
- Mill Engineering department memos 1935-1974
- Patents Files 1960-1974

Very early record series include copies of the Company's Deed of Settlement, the Certificate of Incorporation, Memorandum & Articles of Association and related papers, 1863-1938; Annual Reports cover 1887-1986 and in manuscript form are reports of accounts for 1855-1888. A notebook/insolvency register is dated 1863-1866. Press cuttings about the industry cover 1871-1951.

Records of predecessor and related companies include the Australasian Sugar Company's letter books 1847-1857, which give details of their raw sugar imports. Three large ledgers were found several years ago in the Pymont Refinery covering 1879-1892 with very detailed accounts of the Company's affairs at the time. Several bank pass books have been retained in the collection for the 1870s. Meteorological records have been meticulously recorded from 1882-1969. Board Minutes of the New Zealand Sugar Co. cover 1883-1888.

An often, overlooked, resource in the collection is the variety of reports, publications and similar material it contains. Here are case transcripts and reports of industry related industrial cases in Australia and Fiji, evidence and reports of Royal Commissions and inquiries into the industry 1912-1961.

There are a number of unpublished histories and articles about the company, reports on sugar prospects in India in the 1930s, overseas market reports, papers on beet sugar production, power alcohol, occupational health and safety, capital investment, etc. There are actuarial reports on the provident fund 1905-1956 and a large range of newsletters, manuals and various publications of the company, plus centenary publications of many mills and refineries. The CSR Limited Newsletter covers 1945-87 and describes many of the projects of concern in those years.

The 'box files' from the CSR Limited Library contain letters, photographs and papers arranged in ten subject areas. They offer historical information on the Company, the Knox family, and the Australian sugar industry in the five states, Fiji and New Zealand from the earliest periods until about 1970.

Recent acquisitions include file series of the Export Marketing Division and files relating to the Commonwealth and International Sugar Agreements.

Some records relating to The Australian Estates Co. Ltd. For the period when CSR Limited owned their operations are held. Directors and Shareholders Minutes and Company Registers of some Estates' companies are the major series. Other records concerning the subsidiaries cover 1886-1960s. Some of the very early records were passed on to CSR Limited and are valuable additions to the large collection of Australian Estates records held in the Archives since 1957.

Information on the wartime industry involvement of CSR Limited and the beginnings of the Chemicals and Building Materials sections is to be found in the correspondence series.

Property Department records of the Pymont area contain details of very early property purchases there – maps, legal documents and plans c1830-1950. Included is a series of land deeds and related documents. Similar deeds and documents are available for Fiji lands 1898-1970.

While a steady pattern of usage has been a feature of this collection since it first became available it is a continuing one and much of its content remains unexplored. Your enquiries are welcomed.

**A guide to records of CSR Limited** relating to employees has been prepared by the Archives and is available through our web site or can be forwarded in the mail upon request.