

## Family history sources at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre

An archives of business and labour records may not be an obvious source of information for family history. The records we hold are not primary resources in the same way as birth, death and marriage records – but they can assist in filling in details of your ancestor's life, whether a Newcastle coal miner, a NSW hotel licensee, a waterside worker or a chemist employed in a Queensland sugar mill.

The Noel Butlin Archives Centre holds these records because we collect the records of trade unions, companies, businesses, friendly societies, professional and industry associations, and significant people associated with them.

### Trade unions

Trade unions were formed to benefit their members and so needed to keep track of who their members were and whether they were financial. Membership records can be very abbreviated – just a record of payment, but they may also give addresses and place of work. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century many trade unions ran funeral funds to pay for members' funerals so the date of death may be given.

There are membership records for:

- Actors' Equity
- Amalgamated Engineering Union
- Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners
- Australasian Coal and Shale Employees Federation (Miners' Federation)
- Australian Workers' Union (especially rolls for shearers)
- Clothing and Allied Trades Union
- Waterside Workers' Federation

Before the mergers of the 1990s many unions covered individual industries and specific crafts. Since the mergers most members are covered by such unions as the CFMEU (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union), AMWU (Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union), LHMWU (Liquor Hospitality & Miscellaneous Workers Union), and the Maritime Union of Australia.

The best source to identify which union is likely to be of interest to you is the *Australian Trade Union Archives* website [www.atua.org.au](http://www.atua.org.au). It will direct you to the Noel Butlin Archives Centre or any other archives in Australia which holds trade union records.

Having identified the union, trade union newsletters may include details of war service, retirements and deaths, and will give a good background to conditions of work. If your family member was a union official then the minutes of meetings they attended and files about the cases they worked on will provide more detail of their working lives. There are photographs of workplaces such as wharves, factories and mines, and of members taking part in strikes and protests but often individuals are not identified. The Centre's Library holds copies of many published union histories.

### Companies and businesses

Companies, large and small, kept records of the employees, especially salary and wage records. If your family member was a manager or white-collar worker with one of the big companies such as CSR Limited, Burns Philp and Company, Dalgety (which merged with New Zealand Loan & Mercantile Ltd), or Elders (which merged with Goldsbrough Mort), you will have a good chance of tracing their careers through salary books. Through the house magazine, you will be able to get a feel for the nature of the work and, perhaps, find a photograph. The Elders magazine, for example, has photographs and biographies of many of the staff who served in World War I and CSR Limited published a Roll of Honour. Company histories, held in the Centre's Library, will provide general information about the business.

In the case of the Australian Agricultural Company, the company's archives hold a good deal of information about land management, details of all those who bought and leased land on the Company's estates on the north side of Port Stephens and Newcastle, and details of those whom the Company recruited from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Germany, Chile and China to work as shepherds on their pastoral

estates, or miners at their coal pits in Newcastle, from the 1820s to the 1860s. Less information remains for those recruited in the Colony before the 1850s, however, detailed fortnightly pay sheets survive for the Company's pits between 1875 and 1906.

The records of pastoral stations, especially those owned by the land companies such as Australian Estates Ltd, Australian Mercantile Land & Finance Company and New Zealand & Australian Land Company, often include wages and stores books which can be a good source for tracing Indigenous people and others who worked on these stations. The Centre has a card index to station records.

If the person you are tracing was the publican of a hotel in NSW, the Tooth & Company records will provide information about the hotel (whether or not it was a Tooth's hotel), including photographs of the hotel from the 1920s to 1970s.

If your relative was a captain or an engineer with the Adelaide Steamship Company, you may learn details of individual voyages, and see plans and photographs of the ships they worked on. As with most company records, it is the managers and salaried office staff who are well documented – there may not be any trace of the wage earners and casual staff.

Search the *Guide to Australian Business Records* at [www.gabr.net.au](http://www.gabr.net.au) to find where the records of particular businesses are to be found. Many business records have not survived because there

is no legal requirement to retain them beyond their normal business use.

#### **Friendly societies**

Membership records of friendly societies, which provided medical and funeral benefits, may include useful information. Records from the mid-nineteenth century for NSW and Victoria are held, and there is an index to the extensive records of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows for some Victorian lodges.

#### **Professional and industry associations**

Like trade unions, professional associations were formed for the benefit of members and so needed to keep track of their members and whether they were financial. Membership records will give basic information, but newsletters may report about members' professional lives, such as awards and participation in meetings and conferences.

Industry associations usually have corporate rather than individual membership, but their newsletters will usually have good background information.

#### **Significant individuals**

The Centre holds the records of business people, union officials, labour historians, journalists, activists and feminists.

#### **More information**

For more information about the Archives, go to [www.archives.anu.edu.au](http://www.archives.anu.edu.au). You can contact us at [butlin.archives@anu.edu.au](mailto:butlin.archives@anu.edu.au) or by phone on 02 6125 2219.