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Note-taking and Research Methods



Craig Brittain

Note-taking and Research Methods

"It would be very interesting to have information on the methods of work of the great scholars, particularly those who undertook long tasks of collection and classification. Some information of this kind is to be found in their papers, and occasionally their correspondence"
Ch. V. Langlois

Introduction to the study of history (1898)

Craig Brittain

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for
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"Hardly any original thoughts on mental or social subjects ever make their way among mankind, or assume their proper importance in the minds even of their inventors, until aptly selected words and phrases have, as it were, nailed them down and held them fast."

John Stuart Mill A system of logic (1891).

INTRODUCTION

Too little is known about the note-taking and research practices of eminent scholars, both past and present. Considering the nature of their achievements, and the importance the scholars themselves have often placed on their methods, this is unfortunate. While their published monographs and articles are available for detailed study, information about their day-to-day habits is hard to come by.

The purpose of this booklet is to draw attention to the work practices of a number of scholars, from various disciplines. It is to be hoped that the methods described might help students in the organisation of their own work, and that for a fuller account they might go from here to the sources listed in the bibliography.

The scholars included are as follows:

* **Charles Darwin** (1809 - 1882) natural scientist, thought his method of note-taking and filing to be so central to his work - The origin of species (1859) and The descent of man (1871) - that he described it at length in his Autobiography (1887).

* **Karl Marx** (1818-1883) revolutionary, political economist and historian, had detailed research plans and filled over 165 school exercise books with his notes.

* **Beatrice Webb** (1858 -1943) **Sidney Webb** (1859 - 1947) the Fabian social reformers, compared their note-taking system to a vital piece of apparatus used by physical scientists - Beatrice included a description of it in both volumes of her autobiography - My Apprenticeship (1926), and Our Partnership (1948); and also in Methods of Social Study (1932) written in collaboration with her husband.

* **C. E. W Bean** (1879 - 1968), the official Australian historian of the First World War, and author of six of the twelve volumes of the Official history of Australia in the war of 1914 had 200 notebooks and 110 tons of paper to deal with when working on his history and he found that he had to devise a method of note-taking to handle the enormous quantity of material involved.

* **Abraham Maslow** (1908 - 1970) American psychologist, author of Motivation and personality (1954), and Towards a psychology of being (1962). At the age of 51 he found he had to alter his note-taking practices to include an indexed Journal; his previous system was breaking down under the mass of notes he'd accumulated.

* **Manning Clark** (1915 - 1991) the Australian historian, author of the six volume A history of Australia (1962 - 1987), took the trouble to describe his own system in his last book, A Historian's Apprenticeship (1992), published posthumously.

* **C. Wright Mills** (1916 - 1962) influential American sociologist, author of studies of social control in the U. S. - White Collar (1951) and The power elite (1956) - concluded one of his last books The Sociological Imagination (1959) with an appendix entitled "On Intellectual Craftsmanship", in which he described his use of files, and emphasized its value for practising social scientists.

***Jeremy Boissevain** (1928 -) Social anthropologist: author of Hal-Farrung: a village in Malta, 1969; Friends of friends: networks, manipulators and coalitions, 1974; A Village in Malta, 1980; and Small Entrepreneurs in changing Europe, 1981

***Dean Jaensch** (1936 -) Australian political scientist, author of many works of political analysis e.g. Power politics: Australia's party system (1989), The Hawke-Keating hijack: the ALP in transition(1989), and The politics of Australia (1992). He teaches note-taking skills to his undergraduate classes.

All of these writers have had to address the same problem - that faced by every researcher - how to develop a system of note-taking and filing which allows for quick and faithful retrieval of information; which fits their particular temperament and the requirements of their work; and also stimulates creativity. Although there is considerable diversity in method, and some difference of opinion, there are also many similarities.

CHARLES DARWIN

Charles Darwin thought his method of note-taking and filing to be of crucial importance to his achievements as a natural scientist.

METHOD:

On the "Voyage of the Beagle", Darwin used:

**General notebooks,
Subject notebooks,
Diaries,
Letters**

When he was back in England and working on The Origin of Species he changed his system from note-books to labelled portfolios, and filed notes under appropriate subject headings.

NOTEBOOKS & DIARIES

1. During the voyage of the "Beagle", Darwin wrote a diary and kept general note-books and note-books on certain topics. The diary was often written up weeks or months after the event, and his note-books served as the basis for it.

The rough notes on geology or ornithology made in small note-books were written up separately into large books on particular subjects.

2. When writing his books, he employed the following method: he used a series of note-books devoted to different subjects or aspects of subjects - he simply labelled them with a different letter of the alphabet.

At a later date he tore pages out of his note-books and filed notes in portfolios on different subjects. Also his practice was to make abstracts of the books and articles he read and file them with his other notes in portfolios under subject.

Research method:

"...with my larger books I spend a good deal of time over the general arrangement of the matter. I first make the rudest outline in two or three pages, and then a larger one in several pages, a few words or one word standing for a whole discussion or a series of facts. Each one of these headings is again enlarged and often

transferred before I begin to write in extensio. As in several of my books, facts observed by others have been very extensively used, and as I always had several quite distinct subjects in hand at the same time, I may mention that I keep from 30 to 40 large portfolios, in cabinets with labelled shelves, into which I can at once put a detached reference or memorandum. I have bought many books and at their ends I make an index of all the facts that concern my work: or, if the book is not my own, write out a separate abstract, and of such abstracts I have a large drawer full.

Before beginning any subject I look to all the short indexes and make a general and classified index, and by taking one or more proper portfolios I have all the information collected during my life ready for use". (Darwin, C. 1929, p.72)

Francis Darwin says in his "Reminiscences" of his father, that: "he had one shelf on which were piled up the books he had not yet read, and another to which they were transferred after having being read and before being catalogued..... Many a book was at once transferred to the other heap, either marked with a cipher at the end, to show that it contained no marked passages, or inscribed, perhaps, 'not read', or 'only skimmed'..."(Darwin, F. in Darwin, C. 1929, p.128)

"In each book, as he read it, he marked passages bearing on his work. In reading a book or pamphlet etc., he made pencil lines at the side of the page, often adding short remarks and at the end made a list of the marked pages. When it was to be catalogued and put away, the marked pages were looked at, and so a rough abstract of the book was made. This abstract would perhaps be written under three or four headings on different sheets, the facts being sorted out and added to the previously collected facts in the different subjects. He had other sets of abstracts arranged, not according to subject, but according to the periodicals from which they were taken. When collecting facts on a large scale, in earlier years, he used to read through, and make abstracts, in this way, of whole series of journals." (Darwin, F. in Darwin, C. 1929, pp.128 -129)

And Charles wrote: "The success of Origin may, I think, be attributed in large part to my having long before written two condensed sketches, and to my having finally abstracted a much larger manuscript which itself was an abstract. By this means I was enabled to select the more striking facts and conclusions. I had also, during many years, *followed a golden rule, namely, that whenever a*

published fact, a new observation or thought came across me, which was opposed to my general results, to make a memorandum of it without fail at once; for I had found by experience that such facts and thoughts were far more apt to escape from memory than favourable ones. Owing to this habit, very few observations were raised against my views which I had not at least noticed and attempted to answer." (Darwin, C. 1929, p.60) (*my emphasis*)

On Writing:

"There seems to be a sort of fatality in my mind leading me to put at first my statement of proposition in a wrong or awkward form. Formerly I used to think about my sentences before writing them down: but for several years I have found that it saves time to scribble in a vile hand, whole pages as quickly as I possibly can, contracting half the words; and then correct deliberately. Sentences thus scribbled down are often better ones than I could have written deliberately." (Darwin, C. 1929, p72)

[In latter years his method was to write] "a rough copy straight off without the slightest attention to style. It was characteristic of him that he felt unable to write with sufficient want of care if he used his best paper, and thus it was that he wrote on the backs of old proofs or manuscript. The rough copy was then reconsidered, and a fair copy made. For this purpose he had foolscap paper ruled at wide intervals, the lines being needed to prevent him writing so closely that correction became difficult. The fair copy was then corrected, and was recopied before being sent to the printer "(Darwin, F. in Darwin, C. 1929, p.130) Then came the work of revising and correcting the proofs.

KARL MARX

METHOD:

Note-books, research plans, letters

From his student days in Bonn to the end of his life Karl Marx used note-books for his research. He described his method in a letter to his father (10th -11th November 1837): " I [have] adopted the habit of making extracts from all the books I read... and incidentally scribbling down my own reflections" (Marx, 1975, vol 1. p17). For 50 years he copied thousands of extracts, many of which he later quoted or referred to in his published works. He underlined special passages for inclusion in the books and articles he was working on, and occasionally made comments in the margin. (Draper 1971, pp.13-14)

As well as extensive copying he also paraphrased passages and summarized arguments, made biographical and historical synopses, abstracted books & articles, and recorded statistical data - all of which went into the note-books interpolated with the extracts. 1. In some cases he made indexes (e.g. for his study on the French Revolution) or added a contents page to the front of a note-book.

There are approximately 165 note-books still in existence, most preserved in the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam. They are generally devoted to specific subjects, (e.g. agriculture, money, English history etc.), but if he thought a book to be of special importance he would sometimes assign a separate notebook to it. (Rubel 1957; and, Padover 1980, p.173)

Marx underlined freely and made marginal comments in the books he owned himself, and also interleaved loose sheets of notes. For most of his life, though, he was too poor to afford many books hence the need to copy long extracts. But even when he was relatively well off, in the 1870's, he continued with this method - the act of copying obviously helped him to fix information in his memory.

First and foremost Marx believed in the importance of planning his projects, and his note-books contain many revised plans for work in progress.

I. For an example of Marx's method see the notebook he kept on the Paris Commune (Marx 1971b), which was followed by two preliminary drafts, and the final version of The Civil War in France (published together in: (Marx 1971a)

He had two sorts of note-books, (1) study note-books, for reading notes, as described above, and (2) work-books, which were in effect drafts of books or pamphlets.

What has become known as Grundrisse (1857- 58) is an example of these work-books and perhaps best reveals his method of operation. It originally comprised seven note-books and contains a plan of the six books Marx proposed to write for his *Economy* - 1. Capital, 2. Landed Property, 3. Wage Labour, 4. the State, 5. International Trade, 6. World Market. The first book of the six (the one on capital) was to consist of: (a) capital in general, (b) competition, (c) credit, and (d) share capital. (Nicolaus 1973, p.55). And the first of these four sections ('capital in general') was in turn subdivided into three parts, namely 1. Value, 2. Money (with detailed subheadings), and 3. Capital, divided into the process of production and the process of circulation (McLellan 1971, p. 10). In the end only part of the first book was finished in Marx's lifetime - Das Kapital - (and volumes 2 and 3 of this had to be completed by Engels from Marx's notes).

Planning was necessary to his work method. He prepared outlines and detailed synopses, then read exhaustively on his subject, copied extracts and made critical annotations. At the same time he worked on drafts, modifying or changing his initial plan to accommodate new knowledge or political developments - the whole task being one of increasing "self clarification".

His correspondence, too, should be considered an important part of his research method; it was voluminous, and through it he refined his ideas, often revising or changing the plans for his projects.

Because of the overtly political nature of his work Marx has been accused of manipulating his results - i.e. fitting his facts to his theories (A. J. P Taylor, quoted in Whittam 1980, p.87). Whatever the truth of such allegations (and they are to a large extent politically motivated), it does not discredit the central importance of theorizing for the researcher. As Charles Darwin once said: "About 30 years ago there was much talk that geologists ought only to observe and not theorize; and I well remember someone saying that at this rate a man might as well go into a gravel pit and count the pebbles and describe the colours. How odd it is that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service". (Darwin, C. 1903, p.176.)

"I have an old belief that a good observer really means a good theorist." (Darwin, C. 1903, p.1950)

Although Marx wrote nothing about research method his practice closely resembles that recommended by the British historian C.G Crump :

The one thing he [the researcher] should not do is to start to make notes without having a plan of his work somewhere.... In the process of finding and selecting his subject, he must necessarily have learnt something about it, enough at any rate to be able to describe it....His obvious course is to begin by writing down all he knows, all he surmises, and all he wants to know. It will not be wasted labour; as he writes the form and arrangement of the complete work will be determined; he will discover what he knows, and what is still more important, what he does not know...(Crump 1928, p.123)

"Some will prefer a list of headings grouped under larger headings, showing several sections and the chapters in which they are to come; others may prefer a connected narrative form; others may find a chronological statement more to their liking; in some cases a mixture of all these forms may be most convenient." (Crump 1928, p.123)

"...The original plan guides the researcher to the materials to be employed, and suggests the use to be made of them. The systematic exploration of those materials and the recording of the results of that examination in the form of notes follows next. The plan will require modification in consequence of the knowledge thus gained..[but]..it is well to complete investigations of the mass of material before revising the plan of research." (Crump 1928, p.135)

Using this method Marx produced a considerable amount of work; even so it was only a fraction of what he intended. Engels made the criticism that: "as long as you still have unread a book that you think important, you do not get down to writing" (quoted in McLellan 1971, p.5). And at the end of Marx's life, when Kautsky asked him whether the time hadn't come for him to publish his complete works, he responded that "they would have to be completed first" (quoted in McLellan 1971, p.15). He admitted in a letter to Ferdinand Lassalle: "...I have a quirk... of finding fault with anything I have written and not looked at for a month, so that I have to revise it completely." (28 Apr. 1862; Marx 1975, vol.41, p356) Marx, like many a scholar before and since was hindered by a

temptation to perfectionism 1. - a temptation he was able to overcome, to some extent at least.

1. An extreme example is that of Lord Acton (1834-1902), the great liberal historian, who set himself the task of reading everything published and so, in a very long life, only managed to write one book and a few essays and lectures. The historian Sir Charles Oman visited Acton's house after his death. Never, he said, had he seen " a sight that more impressed on me the vanity of human life and learning." (Oman 1939, p.210)...."There were shelves on shelves of books on every conceivable subject....The owner had read them all, and many of them were full in their margins with cross-references in pencil. There were pigeon-holed desks and cabinets with literally thousands of compartments, into each of which were sorted little white slips with references to some particular topic, so drawn up (so far as I could see) that no one but the compiler could easily make out the drift of the section. (Oman 1939, p.209).

Reflecting on this Oman commented that: "...some people get so engrossed with the accumulation of material that they cannot stop hunting for more corroborative evidence, and continue hunting for ever, never making a halt to co-ordinate and arrange what they have gathered. There is always a desideratum not yet discovered, without which the complete arrangement of the finished work cannot be undertaken. And for this desideratum they go on searching for ever, and finally die, leaving behind them a pile of disconnected scraps, and of notebooks of half -arranged material...If there is any work in the world thoroughly wasted, it is that of the man who collects a quantity of useful information, and then passes away without leaving any proper record of it. (Oman 1939, p.206)

...It would have been better to have written two or three solid monographs on one of the many scores of topics on which the accumulator had been pondering, than to have collected in one's brain countless lights on all manner of historical subjects, whose correlation perishes when the brain is gone.

In short the ideal complete and perfect book that is never written may be the enemy of the good book that might have been written. *Ars longa, vita brevis* - one must remember the fleeting years, or one's *magnum opus* may never take shape, if one is too meticulous in polishing it up to supreme excellence." (Oman 1939, pp.210-211)

Oman felt that the cause of Acton's failure, and those like him, was not only their addiction to research for its own sake (and a possible inferiority complex about their own ideas and prose style compared to the "masters") but also the fact that their projects are often too large - Acton's projected "History of Liberty" - would, if completed, have encompassed all of human history. For this reason Oman criticizes "vast and ill-defined aims." (Oman 1939, p.211) And when advising students suggests that: "It is much better to start on some definite piece of work...rather than to embark on universal histories, or dissertations on some tendency extending over many ages."

(Oman 1939, p.211) *On Acton's work methods see: (Butterfield 1961, pp169-199; and, Butterfield 1955, p.209 and p.217)*

BEATRICE & SIDNEY WEBB

METHOD:

For their social research Beatrice and Sidney Webb refined a system described by the French historian Ch. V. Langlois, in his Introduction to the study of history, 1898. It consisted of three separate procedures:

- 1. noting on separate sheets - one fact per sheet, with uniform lay-out of sheets.**
- 2. A summary report of each distinct piece of research.**
- 3. Index - providing cross reference and authority for headings.**

Also, Beatrice maintained a detailed diary which provided background narrative & commentary on their work and cross references to their notes.

NOTE-TAKING ON SEPARATE SHEETS

Beatrice explained the method in My Apprenticeship - (Webb, B. 1926):

"...the first item in the recipe for scientific note-taking is that the student must be provided, not with a note book of any sort or kind, but with an indefinite number of separate sheets of paper of identical shape and size. The reason why detached sheets must be employed, instead of any book, is...the absolute necessity of being able to rearrange the notes in different order; in fact to be able to shuffle and reshuffle them indefinitely, and to change the classification of the facts recorded on them, according to the various hypotheses with which you will need to compare these facts. Another reason against the notebook is that notes recorded in a book must necessarily be entered in the order in which they are obtained; and it is vitally important to be set free from the particular category in which you have found any particular set of facts, whether of time or place, sequence or co-existence. In sociology, as in mineralogy, "conglomerates" have always to be broken up, and the ingredients separately dealt with."
(Webb, B. 1926, p.428)

"On each sheet of paper there should appear one date, and one only; one place, and one only; one source of information, and one only."
(Webb, B. 1926, p.428)

"The one consideration to be constantly kept in view, in this preliminary task of deciding how to record the facts that constitute the subject matter of the enquiry, is so to place the different items of the record - the what, the where, the when, and the classification or relationship - that in glancing rapidly through a number of sheets the eye catches automatically each of these aspects of the facts. Thus, a carefully planned "display", and, above all, identity of arrangement, greatly facilitates the shuffling and reshuffling of the sheets, according as it is desired to bring the facts under review in an arrangement according to place, time or any other grouping. It is, indeed, not too much to say that this merely mechanical perfection of note-taking may become an instrument of actual discovery." (Webb, B. 1926, p.430)

"An instance may be given of the necessity of the "separate sheet" system. Among the many sources of information from which we constructed our book *The Manor and the Borough* were the hundreds of reports on particular boroughs made by the Municipal Corporation Commissioners in 1835. These four huge volumes are well arranged and very fully indexed; they were in our own possession; we had them read through more than once; and we had repeatedly consulted them on particular points. We had, in fact, used them as if they had been our own bound notebooks, thinking that this would suffice. But, in the end, we found ourselves quite unable to digest and utilise this material until we had written out every one of the innumerable facts on a separate sheet of paper, so as to allow of the mechanical absorption of these sheets among our other notes; of their complete assortment by subjects; and of their being shuffled and reshuffled to test hypotheses as to suggested co-existences and sequences." (Webb, B. 1926, p.431)

For similar reasons the Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey, recommends the Webb system as an antidote to what he calls "scissors and paste" history - the practice of merely taking slabs of information from a variety of sources at face value and stitching them together. In his opinion note-books are the probable cause of this practice (it being so easy to copy or paraphrase without thinking) and advises the adoption of the Webb system where each small piece of evidence should be noted on a separate sheet of paper" (Blainey 1954, p.341).

"The historian will eventually possess thousands of similar sheets, filed in perhaps fifty or a hundred labelled folders. To write a

particular chapter he gathers and studies his notes of the same subject heading, shuffles them into chronological order or whatever he chooses, and commences to recreate the past. *Thus he masters and reconstructs the evidence instead of letting the evidence, as arranged by previous writers be his master. And the mastery of the evidence is the only antidote to prefabricated history.*" (My emphasis) (Blainey 1954, pp.341-342)

He gives the following example of what a typical sheet might look like, again, like the Webbs, emphasising the importance of uniformity of lay-out.

DIGGERS RIOT	1864 27 November
A dozen German diggers hooted and thumbed their noses at a mounted trooper at Growlers Gully this evening. <i>They</i> ran off laughing when challenged by a shot from his musket.	
	Ballarat Reporter 30/11/64

Blainey strongly believes that: "Whereas several notebooks can easily hold a few hundred entries sufficient to compile a prefabricated history, scores of cross-indexed notebooks would still not satisfy the writer who believes that each item of evidence is worth recording and dissecting. The notebooks would be too unwieldy." (Blainey 1954, p.341)

REPORTS & DIARY

Writing regular summary reports and keeping a research diary would seem to be integral to such a system, although it didn't occur to Beatrice that her diary was a part of it. For Beatrice her diary was the substitute for the novel she always wanted to write - the place where she wasn't hampered by the masses of facts which her research work necessarily involved. As she put it in her diary on February 1st 1895: "I want to have my 'fling'. I want to imagine anything I damn well please without regard to facts as they are. I want to give full play to whatever faculty I have for descriptive and dramatic work. I want to try my hand at an artist's work instead of mechanics. I'm sick to death of trying to put hideous facts, multitudinous details, exasperating qualifications, into readable form." (Webb, B. 1983, p.67).

But inevitably she did use it to comment on their work; to try out theories, and reflect upon the patterns or irregularities etc., that seemed to be emerging in their investigations.

For example: an entry during their investigations into local government in April 1899: "...The personalities of Leeds public life are neither interesting nor attractive. Leeds and its inhabitants strike me as equally unlovely. "Getting on", measured in money, is the dominant idea: the rich are conventional and purse proud; the working man dull, and without fight or faith. In fact the Tory squire and the Tory brewer are more public spirited and more progressive than the lower middle class Liberal. Leeds' Liberalism is the crudest individualism: negative and destructive; anti-state church, anti-public expenditure, the sweeping away of what they call "privilege" and the bringing in of political machinery for securing the equal value of all men's votes. No faith in any motive but that of pecuniary self-interest; no conception of any more complicated structure than the universalised ballot box....The saving grace, which has kept Leeds municipal government free from the grosser forms of corruption, has been the childish vanity which makes the ordinary Leeds shopkeeper desire to hear himself called "Alderman", still more, my "Lord Mayor". Social ambition has prevented the motive of pecuniary self-interest from Americanising Leeds municipal life. After all, social ambition is a form of reverence for something better than yourself - the lowest form because the end aimed at is self-advancement - still a leaven because it means a recognition that some men are superior to yourself: which is true." (Webb, B. 1948, p.157)

While the Webbs were persuasive exponents of their note-taking methods it is true that this system is more suited to the official documents of unions, government bodies, institutions etc., and anonymous articles, than the creative work of individual authors. Langlois (Langlois 1966, pp.108-109) pointed out that there would be some materials which would not benefit from this breaking down into component parts, information which would only be useful if kept in its original context. As he says, the speeches and writings of Cicero are probably not going to be of much value cut up and arranged under subject headings.

The same observation was made by the historian C. G. Crump: "a collection of notes made from one mass of material loses much of its

meaning to the maker unless it is kept together in the order in which the notes were found and made". That "notes vary in size and importance". And that because of this "the rule of a separate slip for each note is neither possible nor reasonable." But most importantly: *.. "The notes to be taken from one mass of material must be kept together because they have a common origin and subjected to a common principle of criticism. They must, as an aid to the memory, be kept together in a compact form; it is not advisable to mix together for any scheme of classification, notes taken from masses of materials of different kinds"*. (Crump 1928, p.139)

The other danger inherent in the Webb system is that as well as revealing underlying patterns and stimulating thought through helpful juxtapositions it also allows for the revelation of false patterns - those that don't exist outside of the researcher's own imagination - many an anthropologist and historian has come to grief in this fashion.

C.E.W. BEAN

METHOD:

Charles Bean, official Australian war historian, kept extensive diaries during the First World War. When writing the histories he made notes on scraps of paper which he then transcribed into notebooks, indexed by subject.

1. DIARIES: Bean's war diaries (his personal view) & notebooks (interviews) provided the framework for the histories.

Early on he thought about the advantages & drawbacks of the diary method:

The entry in his diary for Nov 27th. 1914 :

"I have decided to make this diary my chief personal record of the war. A classification of items under subjects - such as I generally make - is not suitable for this job - not yet at any rate. The diary has drawbacks; but, after all, where the events are mainly historical, and later events put the nose of earlier events out of joint, the diary form is useful. Generally I have had to describe and explain merely a state of affairs which have already become facts - the wool trade; life in the bush or on rivers [subjects of Bean's earlier journalism and books]. There are strong points against a diary. It is not always easy to find from it the facts you want when you are afterwards writing up some particular subject e.g. our men - the British officer - the problem of our sea transport. It would be easier to write these things up if at the time when the points are noted they were noted under that heading (as I have usually done) I try to do this too. But the main record, I can see, will be most conveniently kept in diary form." (Bean 1983, p.30)

2. USE OF NOTEBOOKS: Bean tackled one chapter of his history at a time, making notes from secondary sources, the official war records and his own diaries on scraps of paper, & arranging these chronologically, or by subject or particular event. To get an overview - to bring, as it were, all the sources together in one place - the information was then transferred to marginally indexed notebooks.

In an account of the writing of the Official History which was published in the Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society

(Bean 1938, p.101-103) he explains how he decided to use large notebooks, for organising his notes, in preference to the "commonly recommended system of cards arranged under subject headings".

Bean described his system & his reasons for it:

"In grappling with the records, I at first thought that a system of making notes on cards or loose leaves would be the most useful method. The cards would be distributed later under their several subject headings. But I soon found that, for this work, such a method was impossible. In compiling a section of narrative of the Landing at Anzac, for example, one had to study perhaps fifty short notes, each containing the portion of some personal narrative relating, say, to the time between noon and two p.m. on April 25, 1915, and to the front line on the 400 Plateau. It was impossible to get the necessary comprehensive glance over the notes relating to a single incident; so much time was wasted in turning over the leaves hunting for the five or six notes that one desired to compare - the next moment it would be another group - that this method quickly ruled itself out. It was far quicker and more convenient to use a large notebook marginally indexed for twenty-five or thirty subjects possibly covered by the records under study and to enter all notes relating to the same subject on one page, or, if there were too many for that, on adjacent pages, which themselves were subdivided on the same system. The marginal index to some extent corresponded to the proposed chapters, but was more minutely sub-divided. Where the matter dealt with was an obscure and complicated military operation...the notes were distributed on the individual pages in accordance with the time and the point in the fighting line to which they related. Thus perhaps a dozen notes relating to the same place and time would come together on part of a page... This system quickly proved itself useful, and has generally been followed ever since." (Bean 1938, p.102)

Full Notes and Reference:

"In the matter of making notes, two other useful principles were quickly arrived at. First, even when drawing information from books, it was a definite saving of time and trouble in the long run to make a note of almost every point that was likely to be useful. If I merely noted the volume, page and subject, with the object of consulting them again when writing the chapter, the old trouble of loose-leaf notes cropped up again in a different form, and one's desk and its surroundings quickly became so clustered with books that one's work came to a standstill....Even if an actual quotation was likely to be made, unless it was a long one, it was usually a saving of

time to transcribe the passage carefully into the notebook. Noting in shorthand proved too dangerous; several bad mistakes through using it were narrowly avoided.

Second, it was most dangerous to make any note without recording the source of it, for two reasons: for one thing, it was essential to know the authority for the information before one could weigh its worth... Moreover, and most important, we constantly required to look up the context of the note or some point connected with its subject. If the reference was there, this usually took a minute; but if I had slipped and omitted the reference - ! " (Bean 1938, p.103)

In his essay "The technique of the contemporary war historian" (Bean 1942) he described his methods further:

"In making notes, the great number of sources precluded any reliance on mere references to the page or file numbers. I often tried to avoid the expenditure of time involved in making notes or extracts, but the interruption of writing by the necessity of finding and re-reading the passages, and the clogging of one's desk and the surrounding tables by mountains of books and files rendered that system mechanically impossible as well as mentally irritating... Occasionally, of course it was the only reasonable method - for example, it did not pay to copy down, word for word, passages totalling, say, 1000 words; in the rare cases in which it would be necessary to make such quotations, reference to the source would not materially interrupt the work. But normally a full note had to be taken of every useful point; and where it was probable that the source would have to be quoted in the history verbatim, it usually saved time and worry to transcribe the passage. I personally found by far the most useful method to be to devote to each main phase of the subject (say, to one battle, or to one winter's campaign) a large notebook, usually of some 200 pages, foolscap in size, with the edge of the pages incised for marginal indexing. I usually cut the edges myself, allowing for some 40 subject headings. Before taking the first note I filled in, perhaps, two-thirds of the headings, choosing those that were certain to be required and leaving blanks for other subjects. Related subjects were generally kept near together, and I found it useful to mark some groups of marginal headings with a particular colour - say, red for British and Australian operations, red stripes for American, blue for French and green for German. By this means one could turn up the required page of the notebook with little more than a single movement of the hand..

To avoid great trouble and delay it was necessary to begin every note with a reference to its source, (my emphasis) and, as this process occupied, in

aggregate, much time, it was necessary to use the shortest possible symbol. Thus 178/42 meant the 42nd page of the 178th volume of my diaries.... The accidental omission to record the source of some note constantly resulted in hours - sometimes days - of most irritating search, which was often necessary either to ascertain the authority of the statement, or to find some passage closely associated with it, but not originally thought worthy of inclusion in the note. Where many consecutive notes came from the same source a marginal line could indicate this.

So much time was lost in searching for passages that had been read but not thought worthy of note that the original conception of what might be useful had to be enlarged.... There was a temptation, also, to note points of outstanding interest but not intended for this particular history, although if now overlooked might never be made known... Of course, thousands of the notes that seemed likely to be of use were never in fact used: and all kinds of interesting scraps of information...are to be found in the pages labelled "General" (Bean 1942, p.73-75)

ABRAHAM MASLOW

METHOD:

Both as a research student and as a practising psychologist Maslow used 3x5 cards for his notes, which he arranged in files by subject. Later he also kept a journal:

He jotted down every idea that came to him, at any hour of day or night, on 3x5 cards

Then he filed cards within several dozen folders with titles like Dominance, Masculinity/Feminity, Values (i.e. broad subject headings).

To express more sustained thoughts, he typed rough drafts of short papers, making a number of copies for cross-indexing.

By 1959 his files were so extensive that it was difficult to keep track of his ideas. He hoped that keeping a daily journal would enable him to better organise his work & develop his insights more systematically. (Hoffman 1988, pp.248-249)

He indexed the journal at the back as he went along, using same sort of headings as for his files. He also continued using the 3 x 5 cards. The journal was in effect his method of writing up summaries of his research, reading, ideas.

As he wrote in his journal. *Cuernavaca, June 1958-September 1959.*
"I'm reading Kierkegaard's Journals and have recently finished Ruth Benedict's Journal set and am thinking of the advantages of keeping one myself. Also, the system I've been using is getting to the point of breaking down, what with carbon copies and cross indexing and numberless headings under which to file. I have file cabinets full - so full and big that things get lost in them. I've always had the custom of thinking and writing simultaneously on 30 or 40 topics at the same time anyway, but now there are even more - must be 100 or so - and also I can see that its falling together and interlocking into a single big job, a philosophy of human nature. Everything I write seems to be related and connected with everything else I'm writing, so that often I am tempted to make 6 carbons for cross-indexing - and it could easily be 12 carbons. Also, I don't have enough typing help ever. A journal system should help on this score. I can have typed out of it whatever seems useful at its second

stage of development. Often for me the first stage is almost free association, not necessary to type. I think I'll continue to use my present system of organizing my thinking and writing - 3x5 cards and 8 1/2 x 11 sheets, topically filed - whenever the topic is clear enough and well enough developed to be singled out and separated for future developing and perfecting, or for classes or lectures, etc. And until that point leave it inchoate in a journal, but not lost. A place for the 1st stages in thinking..."
(Maslow 1979, p.3)

MANNING CLARK

METHOD:

The Australian historian Manning Clark used note-books (more or less devoted to the topic under investigation at the time) for noting ideas - ideas for paragraphs, insights, personal reflections.

And he used folders in which he arranged notes thematically and/or chronologically - for timecharts, topics & biographies (topics & biographies could be sub-divided & have their own time-charts etc.)

NOTEBOOKS:

Before 1958 Clark had made his notes on scraps of paper; after this he used notebooks "small enough to fit into a coat pocket" (Clark, M. 1992a, p.64) filled with thoughts and impressions on the subject under study.

"There never was a grand design or over-all plan. The preparation was just as piecemeal as the writing. All the impressions were written down in the little black note book. I began to write down ideas in all sorts of places. Sometimes as ideas occurred to me during a journey in an aircraft - writing down ideas or drafts of paragraphs...The little black books were the repositories of my own hopes and my own despairs, my struggles to overcome weaknesses so that justice could be done to the work...(Clark, M. 1992a, p.73)

FOLDERS:

"The movement from chaos to design was never planned or foreseen. It just happened. In the beginning all the notes were crammed into a folder or folders for a tentative chapter. So for the beginning of volume 1 of the history, there were folders on The Earliest Times to Catholic Christendom;...another on the contribution of the Protestants (which had as its sub-theme the end of Protestant ascendancy in Aust.);...another on the Sons of the Enlightenment....

But there had to be more discipline in the collection and arrangement of the material. Again there was no plan, no day on which a review of the situation occurred, or any confession of my errors or failures.

Gradually an order was imposed on the chaos. There were folders for each year (sometimes two or three or four folders for a year). There was a time-chart for each year - sometimes a timechart for a week or a month. There was also a folder for each individual who was to play a prominent or maybe a less prominent part in any

volume. Sometimes for a major character - such as W.C. Wentworth or, later, R.G. Menzies - there would be two, or three, or four folders of notes on them - yes, and the time-chart, and some notes of my own on what I believed "kept those men alive". There were folders of notes for "topics" - such as immigration, land policy and legislation, the sugar industry, wool, wheat, iron and steel, coal etc. So for the writing there would be three types of folder on the desk - one for each of the year, the relevant topic and the relevant biography. There was also the relevant little black book." (Clark, M. 1992a, p.74)

He developed a routine of producing four handwritten pages (1500-2000 words) a day i.e. 8000-10,000 words per week.

The first draft "...was generally hopeless, useless, an embarrassment." (Clark, M. 1992a, p.75)

Then he did a second draft "...which had some resemblance to what I had dreamed might one day appear on the page. There was a third draft which incorporated some parts of the second draft ... Then there was the long-drawn-out fiddle and mucking around with the third, until the whole seemed to have the design and tone for which I was aiming." (Clark, M. 1992a, pp.75-76)

C. WRIGHT MILLS

METHOD:

C. Wright Mills recommended that students starting out in the social sciences establish a file, the equivalent of the imaginative writer's journal. This would not only contain notes from books and periodicals but include relevant personal experience and reflections.

Mills strongly believed that a scholar's personal and professional experiences and interests could not be separated; that a good scholar should be constantly making notes about his or her life and work and arranging them into various categories; that the resultant files would be integral to the work.

In his essay "On intellectual craftsmanship" (Mills 1959, p.195-226) he described his own methods - essentially, the use of files. He preferred these to note-books for the same reason as the Webbs because they were easier to manipulate. But he differed from the Webbs in his attitude to his files: they were *work-* books, and not something intended for posterity. As such they didn't have to be tidy.

By making this decision he gave himself a great deal of freedom - he could do what he liked in his files. 1. Most importantly, he didn't have to be coherent. He could include clippings, bits of free association, half formed and confused ideas, words, phrases; the main thing was to get the words down - then they could be worked on. His files were the equivalent of the artist's sketchbook in which all sketches, however fragmentary, are seen as preparation for the final painting. It was a system designed to break down any inhibitions he might have felt about writing.

As he saw it, working with his files - adding to them, re-arranging them, revising, polishing etc. - was in itself intellectual production. Finished books and papers were simply the logical outcome. Notes

1. There is similar reasoning behind Noltingk's suggestion of the use of a high and a low note-book. The high notebook is, as it were, the official note-book - neat, well written and arranged; the low note-book is secret, unofficial, into which anything goes. The high note-book used less frequently; it's for taking stock of one's ideas and projects and contains selected extracts written up from the low notebook. But it is the low note-book which is the germinating ground, the place where ideas happen. (Noltingk 1965, p. 118). See also: Dean Jaensch's use of an "ideas file" p. 28 of this booklet.

would be arranged under topics; then re-arranged under different headings as projects emerged from the files.

After deciding upon a project he would examine his entire file, not just the sections that seemed most relevant. Over the years he'd discovered that interesting ideas and new themes often appeared in this way. 1. He would then make an outline for a project and organise his files accordingly, rearranging his notes under new headings.

As a result his files would be organized under a few main projects, with many sub-projects. These would change over the years, with some sub-projects coalescing and developing into full projects.

He also refers to a separate file he kept for ideas for future projects, which he would review regularly.

Although he doesn't go into it, Mills's files would eventually become unmanageable. He would either have to retire files and index them as projects were completed, or possibly adopt Maslow's solution, and keep a separate journal.

1. Since the work of Karl Popper (1902-) into scientific process it has been recognised that chance and randomness play a crucial role in paradigm-shifts both in the sciences and in the creative arts; that breaking new ground, as opposed to merely restating or developing existing theories and ideas involves an amount of serendipity or accidental discovery (see: Koestler 1960; Kantorovich 1989; and, Baggott 1990). Mills instinctively realised this and adopted a system of note-taking and filing which allowed interesting juxtapositions to occur, as a stimulus to creativity. This facility for rearrangement is also built into the systems of Beatrice and Sidney Webb and Dean Jaensch (see relevant sections in this booklet).

JEREMY BOISSEVAIN

METHOD:

Note-books, diary, card system and folders

Anthropology is a discipline in which note-taking is critical. Jeremy Boissevain says that before he went to Malta in the 60's he wanted to look at examples of the field notes of other anthropologists, but could only get to see one of Malinowski's old note-books. In the end he adopted the method used by the anthropologist John Barnes. (Boissevain 1970)

"... I had a little pocket notebook with a hard cover and a pencil, which I carried with me always. In this I jotted down odds bits of information during interviews, and more detailed outlines of the subjects discussed as soon as the informants were out of sight... [Then] I had a series of much larger notebooks.... Into these I wrote up in detail interviews and personal observations, some of the points of which I had usually jotted down in my pocket or stenographers notebook. The lined pages were numbered consecutively and I ruled in a large margin on the left hand side. The entries were made chronologically. In the margin I wrote the headings under which the entry could be indexed....I indicated as many possible headings as I could. These headings and subjects were consolidated in three central indexes at the back of each notebook:....Every day I tried to bring this index up to date, cross-referencing where necessary..." (Boissevain 1970, p.79)

"Besides these notebooks I also kept a daily diary.... This was a chore which I did not do in great enough detail, but I did do it faithfully. The importance of this diary had rightly been stressed repeatedly at the field seminar in London. It provides a rough structure to the subject matter in the notebooks...." (Boissevain 1970, pp. 79-80)

"...I [also] developed a card system which provided data on household composition, occupation, nicknames, political allegiance..."etc. (Boissevain 1970, p.80)

"Besides notebooks and cards I had a system of folders for various activities, certain persons, genealogies, and subjects such as kinship, godparenthood, church organization, and so on. I placed these in a upright cardboard box. Into these I filed pamphlets, texts written by villagers, sheafs of notes, pictures and newspaper cuttings. I also had a growing collection of government department reports,

statistical abstracts, and census reports to which I made constant reference in my comparative work...." (Boissevain 1970, p.80) Then, while still in the field, he consolidated his notes and wrote a 14,000 word paper on one aspect of his research. "I also indexed my notes, thought through a number of problems, and made plans for the rest of my research." (Boissevain 1970, p.80)

When he returned to London for the analysis and writing up, his first task was to finish his indexing. "I expanded certain sections of the index. Using these new categories I reread all my notes, indexing as I went along." (Boissevain 1970, p.81) 1.

After that he began writing and delivered his final report.

Reflecting later about how he could have improved his methods he said that one of his main shortcomings was that "I did not do nearly enough writing. I should have consolidated my data frequently in short reports. One of the reasons I spent more time on my interim report than I should have, was because my writing was rusty, and my data scattered and undigested." (Boissevain 1970, p.84)

This seems to be more or less the standard method followed by many anthropologists: it begins with scratch notes, written up into fieldnotes; card files; journals & diaries & letters; and finally the reports themselves.

Scratch notes & Fieldnotes:

Fieldnotes are the 'lengthy accounts' brought back from the field, and, depending on the anthropologist, are sometimes referred to as "journals", "notebooks", or "daily logs".

1. This system will work while there are relatively few topics; beyond a certain point, however, it will be necessary to create an authority file of terms, so that there is consistency in subject headings. This applies equally to indexes and files. The standard procedure is to create a card file of accepted terms. "A card may be made out for each term we decide to use, and on this we may note such information as the existence of synonyms, or the merging of word endings. To draw attention to related terms, we may use [the following] abbreviations ...:BT broader term *i.e.* a wider subject; NT narrower term *i.e.* a more specific subject; RT related term *i.e.* a subject of equal importance probably forming part of the same wider subject; UF used for *i.e.* the term chosen is the preferred form of synonym and is used for the others." (Foskett 1970, p.19)

The authority file is then consulted before a new index term or subject heading is assigned. Decisions have also to be made about the correct form for authors, corporate authors (government & corporate agencies etc.) and trade names etc.

On chronological and topical arrangements for field notes see also: (Smalley 1960, pp.147-150; and Wolff 1960, pp. 240-254)

Scratch notes are the jottings that precede fieldnotes; they are the notes that are then typed up into an enhanced set of fieldnotes. As the anthropologist, Simon Ottenberg describes them:

"My fieldnotes themselves are based upon scratch notes taken in longhand with a pen on small pads of paper and then typed up in my free time - often in the evenings when I was quite fatigued. The handwritten notes are brief sentences, phrases, words, sometimes quotes - a shorthand that I enlarged upon in typing up, adding what I remembered". (Ottenberg 1990, p.148)

Journals and Diaries:

In addition to writing up the day's thoughts and observations in the form of fieldnotes many anthropologists keep personal diaries. Here they can write freely about their own feelings and experiences, as well as about their work. Such writing often plays important part in the difficult process of getting words on to paper. Also, as Jeremy Boissevain pointed out, because they are chronologically constructed, journals and diaries provide a key to the information in the fieldnotes.

Letters:

To colleagues or supervisors; these often amount to progress reports, the first attempts at analysis.

Reports:

The writing of frequent short reports is recommended by a number of writers as being very useful for consolidating the data collected.

Routine:

Anthropologists emphasize the importance of establishing work routines - regular and consistent habits of diary keeping, note-taking, report writing and filing.

DEAN JAENSCH

METHOD:

A Bibliographic file, an "Ideas file", folders for photocopies.

Dean Jaensch has written extensively on Australian politics and electoral behaviour patterns. As a politics lecturer at Flinders University he instructs his students in note-taking and composition. He recommends a "3 file system", the key feature of which is an "Ideas file" in which notes can be shuffled and grouped and themes allowed to emerge by themselves.

The 3 File System comprises:

(1) **A Bibliographic file:** "Before you begin to read a book or article write the bibliographic details (author &/or editors, title, publisher, place and date of publication, page numbers) on a card. Also the name of the library the book or article comes from.

- File this card alphabetically in a box."

(2) **An Ideas file:** "Write ideas on separate cards - any point, concept, statement, argument you think about or find while reading.

- Clearly indicate if a paraphrase or quotation.
- Include an abbreviated reference (thus linking it to the Bibliographic file).
- Don't copy out great slabs - longer notes go into Photocopy & Notes file with a cross-reference from the ideas cards."

(3) **A Photocopy & notes file:** "folders arranged by subject, & then alphabetically & chronologically.

- Include abbreviated reference (thus linking it to the Bibliographic file)."

Using this system he gives the following advice to students on writing an essay or paper:

- Set a reading deadline 3 weeks before essay due. *No more reading after this.*
- Plan to do 3 drafts of an essay.
- "The hardest thing is to write the first sentence."

- Draft 1:

- Don't go near the 3 files at all. Write the first draft off the top of your head.

- Draft 2:

- Then pick up ideas cards and "play cards". Put them in theme piles. A logical order emerges & becomes the structured logical argument of your essay.

- Read through first draft and re-write using ideas cards & bring in photocopies & longer notes linked to them. By sorting notes in this fashion you will identify gaps in your knowledge. At this point you can go back to the library & read to fill in the gaps.

- Draft 2 b:

- After 2nd draft you may want to do an intermediate draft, tidying up logic etc., making it more cohesive.

- Draft 3

- Read the essay out loud and make appropriate alterations.

Filing:

When the project has been completed the 3 files should be filed under the title of the essay, but kept in separate folders. e.g. :

Racism in Australia in the 90's--bibliography (& date)
Racism in Australia in the 90's--Ideas (& date) Racism
in Australia in the 90's--Notes (& date)

& this material filed under the subject heading for Racism -- Australia, in your main subject file.

Alternatively, once the article or thesis is completed, it is possible to incorporate the Bibliographic file into a larger bibliographic index, (the master Bibliographic file of all books and articles read or referred to over the years) and likewise to re-distribute the notes and photocopies made for a particular project into a general subject file under appropriate headings. Jaensch advises against this; in his opinion all work for a project should be kept together.

He also reminds students to put references on all notes and photocopies (they can be abbreviated, but complete reference must be in Bibliographic file).

(the above based on a lecture delivered by Dr Dean Jaensch at Flinders University to politics students on 31st March 1994) 1.

I. A similar system was devised by Dr. T. Clifford Allbutt, the famous British physician, and described in his Notes on the composition of scientific papers, first published in 1904:

"Every writer has his own method of composing: I will describe that which I have found to answer well enough. For each subject on which I may have to write, I set apart a labelled drawer, or a large quarto envelope, and into it I throw the proper cuttings, slips, and references to books or papers. It is better to copy extracts at the time of discovery than, when at work, to have to fetch them, it may be from a distant library. Unverified extracts and summaries, in yearbooks and the like, must be accepted with caution: often they pervert the meaning, or are false to the context of the original essay. My slips are of the size of cheques, that is about eight inches by three; two inches of one end are left blank. I never make two entries on one slip, nor write on both sides of any. If two or more are used for one entry they are pinned together. When I begin to write these slips may have accumulated for years; the first work is then to parcel the subject into its several chapters, and to write the titles and numbers of these on similar slips of stouter paper. Next, having fixed a bulldog clip upon each of these capital slips, I distribute under them the slips proper to each. The blank ends of the slips pass under the clip, so that no writing is concealed; thus secured the slips are as easily turned over as the leaves of a chequebook. During this part of the work changes in the chapters, or in the number or order of them, often suggest themselves; some need division, some are merged in others. The next task is to arrange the slips within each clip in logical order, when many obsolete notes are destroyed, others blended and rewritten. In the next place I set down heads and subheads upon the left column of a sheet of foolscap folded down the middle. These entries are shifted and reshifted till the order seems clear; meanwhile are entered on the right hand column, opposite to their subjects, forgotten and additional memoranda to be incorporated afterwards. This done, a hasty first draft of the article is made. I do not destroy each slip as it is used; I draw a line across it and store it, lest it be wanted for reference. Round three sides of the manuscript a wide margin is left. The work may now be regarded as half done; I usually make four drafts before the manuscript goes to the printer. In the second draft I delete redundant words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; by doing this rigorously, and pulling the rest together, from one sixth to one fifth of this manuscript, or even more, disappears...(Allbutt 1904, p.10)

SUMMARY

NOTE-TAKING & FILING METHODS

Darwin Method 1 : while travelling

- General notebooks
- Subject note-books
- Diaries
- Letters

Method 2 : research & writing

- separate note-books or portfolios on a topic
- books and journals read, important passages marked with pencil, index made of marked passages, abstract written from these
- abstracts copied and filed under 3 or 4 headings in portfolios

Marx Karl Marx made detailed research plans and believed in the value of copying long extracts from the books he was studying.

Notebooks were devoted to a particular subject & contained extracts from a number of authors.

For some subjects he made indexes of his extracts and notes.

Webbs The Webbs recorded facts, ideas and arguments on single sheets so that they could be arranged and rearranged by subject and then integrated into their own research.

One fact per sheet - with uniform lay-out of sheets.
All notes assigned main subject heading & sub-headings to enable shuffling & rearrangement

A summary report of each distinct piece of research.

Index to file providing cross-references & authority for headings.

Beatrice kept a detailed personal diary

Bean

1. Diaries: Bean's war diaries (his personal view) & notebooks (interviews) provided the framework for the histories.
2. Notes: Bean made notes from secondary sources, official records and his own diaries on scraps of paper, arranging these chronologically, or by subject or event. For ease of handling, and to pull the many strands together, he then transferred the information to marginally indexed notebooks.
3. Notebooks:
Large notebooks, usually of some 200 pages, foolscap in size, with the edge of the pages incised for marginal indexing, allowing for some 40 subject headings. Before taking the first note he filled in, perhaps, two-thirds of the headings, choosing those that were certain to be required and leaving blanks for other subjects. Related subjects were generally kept near together, and he found it useful to mark some groups of marginal headings with a particular colour. By this means he could find the necessary notebook and turn up the required pages quickly.

Maslow

Notes on 3x5 cards filed in several dozen folders with subject headings of areas of main interest

Short papers & summary sheets written, copied & filed under a number of appropriate headings & cross-indexed.

To this system he added a Journal, in the hope it , would allow him to better organise his work & develop his insights more systematically. At back of Journal he made an index with same sort of headings as in his files to tie the two together.

Manning Clark

1. Note-books: for noting ideas - ideas for paragraphs; insights, personal reflections.
2. Notes arranged thematically and chronologically in folders - timecharts, topics & biographies (which could in turn be sub-divided & have their own time-charts etc.)

Mills

File of projects with various subdivisions. Contained ideas, excerpts from books, personal notes, bibliographical items & outlines of projects.

Notes constantly arranged & rearranged as projects emerged i.e. sorted into topics.

Boissevain

Pocket note-books for scratch notes of interviews etc. Notes then written up into large note-books ruled with a wide margin in which he wrote possible subject headings. These subject headings then formed the basis of the indexes he made at the back of the note-books. In these indexes he included cross-references.

Folders for newspaper cuttings, pamphlets, loose notes etc., arranged under subject.

Card system for information about individuals and households.

A research diary.

Regular reports and letters.

Jaensch

3 File system- a Bibliographic file

- an Ideas file
- a Note & Photocopy file

He stresses the importance of keeping a separate bibliographic index, and putting the correct references on every note and photocopy.

CONCLUSION

Note-taking methods are a personal matter. Whether a highly structured system - like the Webbs - is decided upon, or a less rigid system - like Manning Clark's or Dean Jaensch's - depends on the personality of the scholar and the project at hand. 1. There is no one system that will satisfy all requirements and temperaments. Some writers have successfully used cards and files, while others have preferred note-books. Often they have had to change or supplement their methods as their research developed.

What these scholars do have in common is a commitment to writing per se, which results in a constant stream of notes, letters, abstracts, drafts, essays and manuscripts. The note-taking system is only part of the enterprise - an aid to memory and hopefully a stimulus to creativity; but in the end what matters is the final work, not the impressive note-taking and filing system used to get there.

As Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) once wrote, in response to an inquirer: " You ask me how I proceed in taking Notes... I would very gladly tell you my methods if I had any: but really I have as it were none. I go into the business with all the intelligence, patience, silence and other gifts and virtues that I have.... and as for a plan, I find that every new business requires as it were a new scheme of operations, which amid infinite bungling and plunging unfolds itself at intervals (very scantily, after all) as I get along. The great thing is, Not to stop and break down....But as to the special point of taking Excerpts, I think I universally, from habit or otherwise, rather avoid *writing* beyond the very minimum; mark in pencil the very

smallest indication that will direct me to the thing again; and on the whole try to keep the whole matter simmering in the *living* mind and memory rather than laid up in paper bundles or otherwise laid up in the inert way. For this certainly turns out to be the truth: Only what you at last have living in your memory and heart is worth putting down to be printed; this alone has much chance to get to the living heart and memory of other men. And here indeed, I believe, is the essence of all the rules I have been able to devise for myself. I have tried various schemes of arrangement and artificial helps to remembrance; paper-bags with labels, little paper books, paper-bundles, etc., etc.; but the use of such things, I take it, depends on the habits and humours of the individual; what can be recommended universally seems to me mainly above. My paper-bags (filled with little scraps all in pencil) have often enough come to little for me; and in general writing I am surrounded with a rubbish of papers that have come to little:- this only will come to much for all of us, To keep the thing you are elaborating as much as possible actually *in* your own living mind; in order that this same mind, as much awake as possible, may have a chance to make something of it! ". (Carlyle 1969, vol. 2, p.10)

Carlyle, of course, had a phenomenal memory - he reputedly re-wrote the entire first volume of his French Revolution when the only draft was accidentally destroyed; and he did this without the benefit of notes. It was an exceptional gift; one not shared by many people. But his point is still valid: note-taking should never become an end in itself (as it did for Acton) but subserve what must always be the ultimate goal of the writer - the publication of the finished book or article.

1. Researchers have often based their note-taking practices on the methods of respected scholars or mentors.

The Webbs based their system on the one recommended by the French historian, Ch. V. Langlois (Webb, B 1926, p427). Lord Acton, while familiar with the note-book and index system used by his teacher, von Dollinger (and also that of Darwin), chose instead to use the card system of the 18th Century Swiss historian, von Muller (Butterfield 1961, pp. 169-199; and, Butterfield 1955, p.209 and p.217). Geoffrey Blainey adopted the Webb system for his historical research (Blainey 1954, p.341). Jeremy Boissevain, aware of the tradition of note-books among anthropologists, first looked at Malinowski's notebook, then decided to adopt the method used by John Barnes (Boissevain 1970, p.79).

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