**Town Clerk’s Dockets and Special Files Source Sheet No. 32**

The Town Clerk’s Dockets and Special Files are two of the most important series of records held by the City Archives. Both were created by the Town Clerk’s Department, which was the administrative epicentre of the Corporation from 1852 until 1982 (for further information about the functions of the Town Clerk’s Department see Source Sheet No. 30 *Town Clerk’s Department*). Fortunately, both series have survived mostly intact, though there are some damaged nineteenth century Dockets which are not accessible to researchers and are receiving conservation treatment. Together, these two separate record series provide an invaluable and unique source of information about a vast array of subjects relating to the history of the City and the Corporation.

**Town Clerk’s Dockets (Record Series S3)**

The Dockets were the Corporation’s major correspondence series of records dating from 1865 until 1976. The ‘docket system’ of maintaining correspondence was used extensively by the South Australian civil service during the nineteenth century and was adopted as administrative practice by the Corporation.

Essentially a ‘docket’ consisted of items of inwards and outwards correspondence and file notes attached in the top left-hand corner to a manila cardboard backing sheet which was folded in half vertically so as to form a cover for the correspondence. The front side of the cover was printed as a form to record information such as the sender’s name, the subject dealt with, the dates when correspondence was received, acknowledged and answered, as well as any references in the Council’s Digest of Proceedings (which included Committee minute numbers) and references to other related Dockets. The series was arranged in an annual single number sequence with each Docket being given a number on its front cover, starting with Docket No.1 at the beginning of each year.

The docket system originally required that every item of incoming correspondence was allocated a separate numbered docket cover in a continuous series. Over time, however, the Town Clerk’s Dockets became more subject oriented and included copies of replies, extracts from Council Minutes and Committee Reports, newspaper clippings and other papers relating to a particular subject. Because of the manner in which material was added chronologically to the Dockets, they must be read from the last item at the back of the Docket towards the front.

With up to 5,000 Town Clerk’s Dockets being created annually, the series can be used to find information about a wide range of matters dealt with by the Corporation. There are Dockets with correspondence relating to tenders and contracts for public works, applications for employment with the Corporation, complaints about public nuisances, appeals against fines imposed by the Corporation or the activities of Corporation officials, reports of Corporation officers, applications for various licences or permits, requests for relief in paying the rates, applications for stall tenancies at the City Market, enquiries about Council by-laws, policies and practices, memorials calling on the Council to take action on various matters, and (from 1881) applications seeking approvals to undertake building work within the City.

**Town Clerk’s Special Files (Record Series S4)**

The Special Files were created for matters of major importance which required ongoing administrative attention. They were manila flat files to which items were attached via holes in their left-hand margins. The Files were usually made up initially of Town Clerk’s Dockets but also often contained reports, correspondence, memoranda, newspaper clippings and extracts from Council and Committee minutes relating to the particular subject. File titles and numbers were handwritten on the outside of the front File cover, and sometimes references to related Files and Dockets were written on the inside of the front cover.

The series dates from about 1905 to 1976, and consists of almost 700 separate file titles, most of which comprise multiple parts. As such some of the Special Files are quite voluminous, with several comprising parts A to Z or more (for example Special File No.322 dealing with Royal Visits 1952 to 1954, is made up of 65 separate files, consisting of parts A to Z and AA to JJ). As with the Dockets, the Special Files should be read from the back forwards.

A great diversity of municipal subjects are covered by this series, with Special Files having been created for such subjects as Tramways, Torrens Lake, Town Hall, Street Hawkers, Taxicab Control, Victoria Square Remodelling, Children’s Playgrounds, Town Planning, Greater Adelaide, Traffic Management, Street Widening, State Centenary Celebrations, Refuse Destructor, Post War Works, Park Lands Developments, and Corporation Re-organisations, to name just a few.

**Finding Aids**

The Town Clerk’s Dockets and Special Files may be accessed via the following finding aids:

***Digests of Proceedings*** (Series S35) which from the late 1880s started to provide Docket and later Special File references to matters dealt with by Council and its various Committees;

***Index of Town Clerk’s Letters Received*** (Accession 4183) a nominal index to Dockets arranged by the sender’s name, prepared annually from 1857;

 ***Town Clerk’s Letters Received Books*** (Accession 4182) an annual register of inwards correspondence from 1861, arranged in ascending Docket number order,

***Master Index [to Town Clerk’s Dockets and Special Files]*** (Accession 2426) a subject card index to Dockets and Special Files , c1930 to 1976;

***Special Files Register and Subject Index*** (Accession 25) includes a separate alphabetical index and numerical register of Special Files, c 1908 to 1976;

***Morison Indexes*** (Accessions 226 and 228) a personal alphabetical subject card index to Dockets and Special Files created by Alexander Morison (Town Clerk 1937-1946).

**Access**

Public access to records less than 30 years old is not generally available, while those containing information of an exceptionally sensitive or personal nature are withheld. Access may also be refused to records in poor physical condition.

**Further Information**

**City Archives:** Topham Mall, off Currie and Waymouth Streets, Adelaide 5000

**Counter / telephone enquiries:** 9**.**00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday

**Search Room open for public research:** 10.00 am to 4.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday

**Telephone:** +618 8203 7439

**Email:** cityarchives@cityofadelaide.com.au

**Web:** <https://cityofadelaide.com.au/cityarchives>