### Context Unit Registrations Source Sheet No. 8

**What Are They?**

The City Archives holds those records of the Council and the Corporation of the City of Adelaide that have been selected for permanent preservation. To facilitate access to information by researchers, the Archives has prepared detailed Context Unit Registrations which form part of the archival finding aids.

Essentially the Context Unit Registrations attempt to link records to the administrative context in which they were originally created and used.

*A Context Unit can best be described as any person or part of the organisation (i.e. the Council or Corporation) which has produced or maintained records as part of their day to day operational activities.*

Thus, any program, department, division, committee, section, team, working party, Corporation officer or Council Member may be registered as a Context Unit provided they have been the creator or user of records within ACC.

Each of the Context Unit Registrations comprises a brief administrative history of the Unit, together with an inventory of the accessions of records that have been created or used by that particular Context Unit. So far about 160 Context Units have been registered, ranging from Thomas Worsnop to the City of Adelaide Planning Commission. We estimate that there may be over 7,000 Units for the Corporation as a whole from 1840 to the present.

**Functional Approach to Finding Information**

Because of the sheer volume and complexity of archival records it is not really practical to produce a library style subject catalogue to them. Instead, Archivists adopt a functionalapproachto finding information. This approach seeks to establish linkages between the records and their creators.

*A function may be defined as any type of activity carried out by an organisation (or any part of it, including its personnel) in the normal course of its operations.*

Archivists encourage researchers to think in terms of functions rather than subjects. For example, suppose you want to find out about the history of Adelaide’s taxi cabs. The first step towards locating archival records relevant to this subject is to convert it to a related function - in this case the appropriate Corporation function is that of *licensing*. It’s important to discuss the subject you’re researching with the Archivist who will be able to assist with this conversion process.

Having identified the correct function, the next step is to determine which part(s) or person(s) within the organisation had responsibility for performing it. That is, we have to decide which Context Unit(s) within the Corporation were most likely to have undertaken this activity. In our example there are at least three possibilities, each of which seems to have been responsible for administering the licensing function at one time or another - namely, the Inspector of Vehicles (C\_), the City Inspector’s Office (C54), and the Metropolitan Taxi Cab Board (C\_).

To assist researchers in selecting the correct Context Unit(s) the Archives is in the process of developing a *Functional Index to Registered Context Units*.

**Context Unit Manuals**

Once the appropriate Context Unit(s) have been identified, you can then proceed to the relevant Context Unit Manual(s). These are kept in the City Archives’ reading room. Each Manual comprises ten Context Unit Registrations. A Registration normally consists of a brief administrative history of the Context Unit, providing dates and details of its existence, its organisational structure and functional responsibilities.

Unfortunately, detailed registrations have not yet been completed for all Context Units, but most of the major historic ones (like the Town Clerk’s Department, the City Engineer’s Department and the City Treasurer’s Department) have been recorded.

But the Context Unit Manuals do more than this. They also act as a working link between the *records* and their *context*. They do this by including an Inventory of Preliminary Accessions / Record Series for each Context Unit that is registered. In other words, they provide a list of records held by the Archives which have been created or used by each Context Unit appearing in the Manuals (Preliminary Accession / Record Series are terms used by Archivists to facilitate the transfer and processing of records).

You will find that in addition to a description and date range of the record, each entry appearing in the Inventory has been given anAccession Number, which is the number you should quote when requesting to see the record. Thus, in the case of our taxicab licensing, you may have looked at the Context Unit Registration for the City Inspector’s Office (C54) and decided that you would like to see the Licensing Officer’s Journal for 1860 to 1875. The Accession Number for this record is shown as being 653, which enables it to be located by the Archives.

Having selected the record(s) which you feel are most likely to contain relevant information, you should next fill out a Record Request Form (Form A46) and hand it to the Archivist. Don’t forget to include the Accession Number of the record when doing this.

**Further Information**

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

**Counter / telephone enquiries:** 9**.**00 am to 5.00 pm Mondays to Fridays

**Search Room open for public research:**10.00 am to 4.00 pm Tuesdays to Thursdays

**Telephone:** +618 8203 7439

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

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