

## OBITUARY: Pamela Somers Hall née Cocks, 1927 – 2021 An Appreciation

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*Stuart Strachan*



*An original member of ARANZ and founding editor of Archifacts, Stuart was the first archives curator at the Hocken Library, then formally trained at University College London, before becoming Senior Archivist at the National Archives. In 1985 he was appointed Hocken Librarian at the University of Otago, retiring in 2008. A member of the Archives Council for nine years and ARANZ Life Member, he was awarded QSO for services to archives in 2006.*

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With the passing of Pamela Hall at the age of 93 in January this year died the last of our first generation of fully professional archivists. Two others, Michael Standish and Judith Hornabrook, also of National Archives, had predeceased her in 1962 and 2011 respectively. There were others, librarians and museum curators, influential in the care of archives during the crucial formative period of the 1950s and early 1960s — in Auckland Enid Evans, in Wellington Graham Bagnall and Michael Hitchings, in Christchurch John Wilson, and in Dunedin Frank Rogers<sup>1</sup> — but Pam came to stand out from these for the depth and extent of her professional knowledge and experience gained over many years that can still command our attention and respect.

A fourth-generation New Zealander, Pam was born in Riccarton, Christchurch, 29 March 1927, the elder of two children; brother Alan was born three years later. Their father Henry Bromley Cocks, a returned serviceman and engineer, had married her mother Edith Hazel Walker in 1922. The Cocks's were a notable family of Anglican clergy: a grandfather was an Honorary Canon of Christchurch Cathedral and a great-grandparent, first vicar of Sydenham. Further back, the family was connected to the aristocratic Somers Cocks dynasty, politically prominent in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Britain. Not that Pam ever made much of this, but her Anglican faith was important to her all her life.<sup>2</sup>

Pam's early education was first at the local Wharenui school and then at Christchurch Girls' High School, her mother's old school, from 1940 to 1944. A photograph of her as prefect shows a tall girl, who excelled at jump events.<sup>3</sup> After matriculation she entered Canterbury College from which she finally graduated with a MA Hons in history in 1949 with a thesis on Henry Sewell, New Zealand's first prime minister, who in 1853 had been sent to New Zealand to wind up the affairs of the Canterbury Association. Providentially for her later career, she made extensive use not only of Sewell's own journals 1854–60 but also of Canterbury Association despatches, her first real encounter with archives.<sup>4</sup>

In the immediate post-war years there was an acute shortage of professional librarians in New Zealand, so Pam, bypassing teaching, then the obvious path for academically well-qualified women, took the opportunity to undertake the graduate Diploma course at the recently established New Zealand Library School under the controversial directorship of Nora Bateson.<sup>5</sup> A conventional career in librarianship awaited her, but in Pam's own words:

One day after mounting to the top of the stacks of the General Assembly Library in quest of information for some School assignment, I happened to stray through an open door into another part of the building. I felt immediately as though I had entered another world. I was in a large room with book stacks on the outer edges. In the centre was an open space, in the middle of which sat an enormous coloured glass dome covered

with the dust of ages. There were two large tables piled with old papers and seated at the tables were two young men.<sup>6</sup> There was an air of quiet concentration that somehow made one feel that they had been there for ever and would so remain. This was my first glimpse of the Dominion Archives and my first meeting with Michael Standish, the officer-in charge of the Archives...I was so excited I knew immediately that this was what I wanted to do.<sup>7</sup>

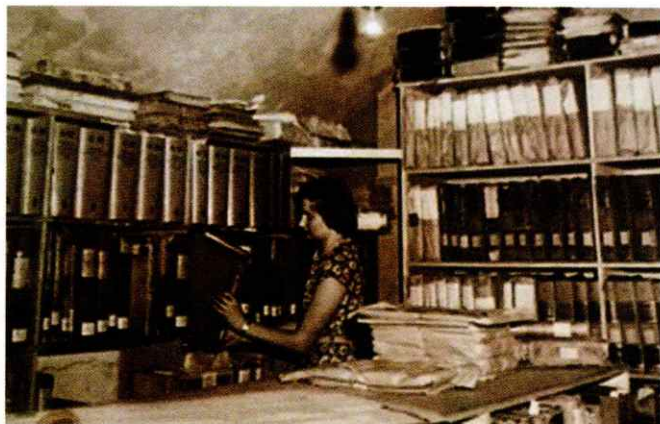
It was an 'On the road to Damascus' moment: Pam was entranced. What she had stumbled on Narnia-like was the ongoing legacy of Guy Scholefield's work as Controller of the Dominion Archives from 1926–1947, when Chief Librarian of the General Assembly Library. Responsibility had then passed to the War History Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, where Michael Standish was initially employed as a research assistant. Michael immediately recognised Pam's interest and enthusiasm and a few months later offered her a permanent position as an assistant, beginning 1 February 1950 with a salary of £575.<sup>8</sup> Over the next twelve years, together they went on to forge a highly effective partnership: Michael Standish, as Officer-in-Charge, was the early visionary, already with plans for a national archives system;<sup>9</sup> Pam, a natural organiser, became his very able lieutenant.

At first there was little technical guidance. The main available text in English was Hilary Jenkinson's magisterial *Manual of Archives Administration* first published in 1922. Written with great emphasis on British medieval records the *Manual* was not easily applied to New Zealand's more recent large accumulations of nineteenth and early twentieth records, mainly of government departments. As Pam herself put it, desperately attempting to "relate the records of the King's Remembrancer's Office with those of the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Nelson" was a trial.<sup>10</sup> Further, Jenkinson considered appraisal for preservation or destruction was no part of the archivist's duties and current records management did not feature. Neither was the Dutch manual, Muller, Feith and Fruin, first published 1898 and available in English translation since 1940, of much help.<sup>11</sup>

Both Standish and Cocks, however, quickly came to one essential truth: that in the long run an effective archives system depended on efficient disposal procedures backed by good current records practice. New Zealand lacked both. Government record-keeping was antiquated and inconsistent across departments; and only informal agreements to consult Archives staff before disposal stood between preservation and seemingly random destruction, an ever-present danger with accumulations of many years spread over numerous locations, all without exception physically unsatisfactory and lacking lists of what was held where.

In 1952 Standish was given leave, at his own expense, to investigate modern practices and procedures in the United Kingdom. It was while he was overseas that the most dramatic episode of Pam's career occurred. A fire broke out in the Hope Gibbons building, Dixon Street, Wellington, on the afternoon of 29 July, destroying and damaging many older departmental records on its top floor which, utterly unfit, had become a records dumping ground for lack of other accommodation. Though these records were not under formal Dominion Archives control, Pam strongly encouraged by her friend historian Ruth Allen<sup>12</sup>, a regular archives user, sought and gained permission from Arthur Harper, the Under-Secretary for Internal Affairs, to rescue what she could from the disaster. As Pam was later to recall, "The records had fallen from the fifth to the third and fourth floors, and were sunk, amid burnt flooring, broken shelving stacks, charred beams, twisted girders, and a mass of entangled pipes."<sup>13</sup> Over the next few weeks, showing considerable energy and initiative working alongside demolition contractors, Pam and fellow staff member Betty O'Dowd,<sup>14</sup> retrieved 1,000 cubic feet of sodden and edge-charred records that required drying. This was not easily done, until Pam hit upon the idea of using a timber kiln, which the Evans Bay Timber Company generously made continuously available over two weeks. Pam and Betty each received a £10 bonus for their rescue work. Despite their efforts, there was much grievous, irretrievable loss, particularly of Lands and Survey, Labour and Employment, Works, Agriculture and Marine records. Pam did not stop there, but followed up with a trenchant memo to her department's Under Secretary, roundly condemning the quite unsuitable housing of widely scattered, historically valuable government records no longer in current use and urging their concentration in a purpose-built Archives building secure against "fire, damp, mice and earthquakes."<sup>15</sup>

These losses, and Pam and Betty's heroic efforts, made national headlines hailing the role of "Two Determined Girls", but more importantly they drew general attention to the parlous plight of our national archives, with a staff of just three, no proper accommodation to speak of, and lacking any real legal basis. There was a general clamour for improvement. Such hardly ever happens quickly within government, and the truth is that the Department of Internal Affairs was somewhat on the wane after its glory days with Joseph Heenan as Under-Secretary and Peter Fraser as Prime Minister. It had many other preoccupations and calls on its resources: royal and distinguished visitors, wildlife, local government, recreation and sport, explosives, lotteries and racing, the Alexander Turnbull Library, etc. No longer in the front rank under the new National government elected in 1949 and not always sympathetically regarded by the Public Service Commission, the Department struggled for attention and influence.<sup>16</sup> Out of the fire, however, did emerge improvements.



A turning point was 1954. Better accommodation was obtained, with the move from the General Assembly Library attic to more commodious space in the Employers Federation Building on the Terrace, though this was almost immediately filled. More important for the future was the week-long visit in August that year of Theodore Schellenberg, Director of Archives Management at the US National Archives, invited by the Department with some trepidation. As one official put it:

Our archives arrangements are so appalling and there is such a general feeling of shame that I see no prospect of the Government inviting him ... our archives situation could not be worse than it is and the help stimulation or jogging that we could get from Schellenberg would be of immense value.<sup>17</sup>

However, the government in the end did invite him, and the advice Schellenberg provided enabled Standish to speak with greater assurance to those in authority about the importance of archives, leading Cabinet to approve a departmental plan for the appraisal of government records, their arrangement and description, appointment of a Chief Archivist with staff, and the introduction of legislation.

Schellenberg may not have included in his advice that an archivist should go to the United States to attend one of Dr Ernst Posner's foundational courses on archives and records at the American University in Washington, where Schellenberg himself taught. However, by happy chance, and encouraged by a visiting American historian Pam had already successfully applied for a Fulbright Travel Grant, which, supplemented with half-pay from the Department (surely, part reward for her role in the Hope Gibbons fire), enabled her to study in the United States, 1954 to 1955. There she got fully to grips with recent appraisal theory and modern records management, later set out systematically by Schellenberg in his seminal text *Modern Archives* (1956). While there she took the opportunity to visit archives on the East Coast, and then crossed to the United Kingdom, taking in the Public Record Office and various county record offices.<sup>18</sup> On the way home to New Zealand, Pam spent a few days in Sydney and Canberra, where she spoke to a gathering of archivists on her impressions of overseas institutions.<sup>19</sup> All of which she recorded in monthly letters to

Michael Standish. About this time, too, Pam was accepted into the UK Society of Archivists as a Commonwealth member.<sup>20</sup>

What came next was of greater significance even than her part in salvaging records from the Hope Gibbons fire. On returning early in 1956 to her old job at the National Archives, Pam drafted a comprehensive report of her findings with recommendations for the better management of government records, particularly their disposal. After study by senior departmental officers, her report was forwarded to the Public Service Commission for further consideration by a special committee chaired by V. W. Thomas, Secretary of the Commission. The report's dual premise was that better current records management meant easier and safer disposal of non-current records, and that easier disposal of non-current records led to better current records management, a virtuous circle that not only improved general efficiency, but also enabled considerable cost savings by freeing up space. The Commission's consequent acceptance of the need to improve general standard of record-keeping led to a revised *Handbook on Records Management* that was sent to all government offices.<sup>21</sup>

Simultaneously, Michael Standish's long and patient nurturing of appropriate archives legislation bore fruit with the passage of the Archives Act 1957, with cross-party support. Crucially, as well as giving the National Archives proper statutory footing, it also vested in the Chief Archivist control of all records disposal for the whole of government - executive, legislative and judicial - and mandated a strong current records advisory role. This forward-looking legislation, alongside which Pam's report happily sat, finally enabled a fully functioning National Archives with augmented staffing to take root, though the longed-for and much-needed headquarters repository was to be as elusive as ever. A specialist records advisory officer was appointed 1959 and records centres established in Lower Hutt and Auckland in 1962. At the same time the work of surveying records, approving destructions and implementing disposal schedules, all of which had begun as early as 1951, was ramped up. Finally, the well-regarded series of preliminary inventories that first appeared in 1953 continued to be published.<sup>22</sup>

Pam was at the heart of all this activity. It is interesting to have Judith Hornabrook's later view of Michael and Pam. Judith had joined the staff as reference archivist in 1958 to make a staff of three.<sup>23</sup> They were "an impressive team". Slightly built, Michael was "studious, but determined – a thinker who could adapt overseas theory and practice to the everyday scene ...A born archivist". Pam, a tall woman, was "just as dedicated, in a more extrovert way, full of energy and very much a doer as well as a thinker". But technically astute also; Judith was greatly impressed by the classification she developed for "a large mass of uncontrolled New Zealand Company correspondence." Very broadly, the two had their separate spheres, only overlapping as necessary. Michael as the effective chief was the broad strategist with overall responsibility, but was also particularly skilled at reference work assisting researchers. Pam's particular interests lay with records management, appraisal, transfer and disposal, arrangement and description, and repository management generally.<sup>24</sup> Each held the other in high regard, shared in Pam's case by historian J C Beaglehole who entrusted her with the complicated land question chapter of Ruth Allan's uncompleted Nelson history, earning her place on its title page.<sup>25</sup>

Pam's interests were not confined to government archives. As early as 1951 a group of concerned librarians had formed an archives committee within the New Zealand Library Association. It was particularly interested in promoting the preservation of local authority, business, and private organisation archives. Michael Standish was member. Its work was largely driven by its convenor Frank Rogers' Otago's university librarian who had had archives training in England. As well as organising seminars, its two main projects were the compilation of an archives practice manual and a survey of local authority records. The first appeared in 1955 as *An Elementary Guide to Archive Practice*, largely authored by Rogers.<sup>26</sup> The survey, despite a strong initial push, was less easy. After Rogers' departure for Australia in 1956, it rather languished, and it was left to Pam who became convenor at the end of 1958 to organise publication of its results, as *Preliminary List of Archives of Local Bodies in New Zealand, 1960*. In the same year she published in the *Canterbury Economic Bulletin* (May 1960) an article on the value of business archives, the first serious writing on the subject in this country.<sup>27</sup>

The Standish-Cocks partnership might well have continued productively for many more years, but for the tragically early death of Michael from a heart attack in May 1962, shortly after his formal appointment as Chief Archivist. Less than a year later Bernie Reid, the very experienced Records Advisory Officer, was killed in an accident. These were huge setbacks, and it was left to Pam to carry the load. In the normal course of events Pam, with her experience, knowledge and qualifications, might reasonably have expected to be the next Chief Archivist. She did apply, but was not appointed. Instead the position went to an experienced departmental officer, John Pascoe, well-known author and mountaineer, but with no archives experience or academic qualifications whatsoever. One cannot escape the feeling that the department was not yet ready to appoint a woman to what was now seen as a relatively senior position.

Whatever her thoughts, Pam, soon to be promoted Senior Archivist, accepted the situation. Pascoe sensibly concentrated on improving conditions and increasing resources—more staff, better pay, and improved accommodation—having success with all three, though a new headquarters building remained as elusive as ever.<sup>28</sup> Apart from reference, Pam was now the main source of professional knowledge and expertise, mentoring staff at regular instruction sessions; and working under delegated authority it was left to her to manage the technical side of things, with both records centres under her control, as well as all appraisal and arrangement and description, and general repository management.<sup>29</sup> It was Pam who introduced custom-made archives boxes to replace the paper parcels tied with pink and green legal tape, a huge improvement. It was at this time, 1963, that Pam was able to visit Australia, examine procedures at the Australian National Archives in Canberra and the State Archives of New South Wales in Sydney; and also the Mitchell and Dixon Libraries to select New Zealand material for microfilm copying.<sup>30</sup>

Pam also began to write about New Zealand archives generally. She contributed the main article on archives in New Zealand to the first volume of *An Enclopaedia of New Zealand* (1966) edited by A. H. McLintock, as well as a number of other smaller entries.<sup>31</sup> Even better from an archivist's perspective was a thoughtful article she published in the *Journal of the*

*Society of Archivists*, 'The Development of the National Archives of New Zealand', which Michael Standish might well have written had he lived. In it she traverses the full range of issues faced by National Archives from its earliest days, with particular emphasis on problems of records centre operation, records disposal, scheduling, description, shortage of qualified staff, and lack of space, exacerbated by a generally poor standard of record keeping, especially file classification which she described as 'appalling'. Nevertheless, it is a story of obstacles overcome, wholly and in part, on the long path towards the more mature national archives that Michael and then she had envisaged all those many years ago when first starting out.<sup>32 33</sup> Pam's deep respect for Michael was fully expressed earlier in the obituary she wrote in the British journal *Archives*. It concluded:

His ready wit (if sometimes caustic in its irony), his complete integrity, his charm and unassuming manner endeared him to all with whom he came into contact, especially to his staff who mourned his passing, knowing that they had lost a chief of exceptional quality.<sup>34</sup>

It might now be added that in Pam he had had a lieutenant of exceptional quality.

By this stage of her career, for all of her experience, Pam was still a relatively young woman, just on forty. Not too late for another life, and so it transpired. Through their mutual involvement at the Catacombs, St Peter's Anglican Church on Willis Street, supporting those in need, Pam had as early as 1960 met a young lawyer, Allan Hall. A friendship developed which over time turned to love. In 1968 the pair married and moved to his hometown of Gisborne, where Allan had found permanent work. National Archives, without a trace of overstatement, recorded a tribute to her in its 1969 *Summary of Work*:

Miss P.S. Cocks (now Mrs A. Hall of Gisborne) retired after continuous service of 19 years. The staff members of National Archives are grateful for the generous way in which she communicated her experience and for the sound archival practices she left behind her. Officers of government departments, researchers and librarians, and others concerned with the preservation of the raw material for history have cause to be grateful to Miss Cocks for work that was often of a pioneer nature.<sup>35</sup>

Pam, being Pam, was not idle for long, finding work almost immediately in Gisborne at the H. B. Williams Memorial Library with its strong New Zealand collection. Children then followed: Veronica in 1970 and Rosemary in 1972. This led her into series of energetic involvements outside archives work: playcentre, for long president of the larger Tairāwhiti association; Girl Guides district commissioner; marriage guidance counsellor; various school committees; Parents Centre; Good Samaritans; and Citizens Advice Bureau. A Bible class leader, she was both Parish and Vicar's Warden at Holy Trinity Church in Gisborne, which she and Allan regularly attended. A keen Labour Party supporter, Pam organised several marches against apartheid and for a nuclear-free New Zealand. A woman of faith, she regarded all such activity as part of her Christian duty.<sup>36</sup>

Her love of archives was not abandoned. For eighteen years she was honorary archivist at the Tairāwhiti Museum with its fine collection of local materials. And then in a last venture on the national scene, she contributed two technical papers on archives to a national seminar organised in 1975 by a revived Archives Committee of the New Zealand Library Association.<sup>37</sup> This was the only time I met her, but somehow the occasion symbolically, and movingly, marked a handing over to an emerging new generation of professional archivists, that her work nationally was now done.

She herself said, shortly before she died, that she had had a good life; and one which all New Zealand archivists have great cause to be grateful for and would do well to remember. A younger colleague and close friend, Rosemary Collier, remarked in her farewell eulogy, "Pam's contribution to the archives profession in New Zealand was unique. Her knowledge, professionalism and influence mean that the shades of her work are everywhere still:<sup>38</sup> "The Fulbright Foundation did well when they invested in Pamela Cocks...."<sup>39</sup>

Pam's funeral was held on 5th February 2021 at Holy Trinity Church. She is survived by her husband Allan, daughters Veronica and Rosemary and their families.

Stuart Strachan

Waitati

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In writing this article I should like to acknowledge the generous assistance of Pam's husband, Allan Hall, of her daughters Veronica and Rosemary Hall, of her former colleague and close friend Rosemary Collier. Stephanie Lash of Archives New Zealand and Peter Miller have also been of considerable help in identifying relevant sources.

## Endnotes

1. F.H. Rogers, Otago University librarian. Not to be confused with Frank Rogers, later Auckland historian, and archives practitioner and advocate.
2. Somers Cocks, J. V. 1967. *A History of the Cocks Family*. Revised edition 1999. Ashurst, NZ.
3. Email, Lynley Earnshaw, Archivist, Christchurch Girls' High School, 4 Aug 2021.
4. Cocks, P. S. 1948. "Early Canterbury in the light of Henry Sewell's journal, 1853–60" Unpublished MA thesis, Canterbury College.
5. See McEldowney, W. J. Geoffrey Alley, Librarian: his life and Work. 2006. Wellington: Victoria University Press, p.228–231.
6. Michael Standish and John Miller, author of *Early Victorian New Zealand ... 1839–1852*. 1958. London: Oxford University Press.
7. Hall, P. S. 1974. "National Archives in Retrospect: a personal reminiscence". *Archifacts* no.2 (June), p.1.
8. N.Z. Public Service Commission. 1953. *List of Persons Employed on the Permanent Staff of the Public Service, New Zealand*.
9. See, for instance, Standish, M. W. 1951. "Historical Records". *New Zealand Libraries*, vo.14 no.2 (March), p.42–44
10. Hall, P. S. 1974. "National Archives in Retrospect: a personal reminiscence". *Archifacts*, no.2 (June), p.2.
11. Muller, S., Feith, J. A., and Fruin, R. 1940. *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*. New York: H. W. Wilson.
12. Subsequently, Ruth Allan wrote a damning indictment of the state of government archives in New Zealand. Allan, R. 1952. "Archives in New Zealand". *New Zealand Libraries*, vol.15 no.10 (December), p.217–223.
13. Hall, P. 2002. "The Hope Gibbons Fire, 1952 (part two)", *New Zealand Archivist*, vol. XIII no.3 (Spring/September) p.1.
14. An Auckland history graduate, Betty was later appointed lecturer in history at Canterbury University College in 1958, from which she retired in 1987. She became a prominent Catholic historian and authority on theology in the Christchurch diocese. Creon, M. 2020. "The Gift of Dame Betty O'Dowd". *Inform. Publication of the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch*, Issue 123 (Winter), p.14–15.

15. Her report is reproduced in: Hornabrook, J. S. 2002 "The Hope Gibbons Fire, 1952 (part one)". *New Zealand Archivist*, vol. XIII no.2 (Winter/June), p.1-3.
16. See Chapter 7, "The Department Loses Ground in the 1950s". In Bassett, M. 1997. *The Mother of All Departments: the history of the Department of Internal Affairs*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, with Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs.
17. Unattributed in an email from Stefanie Lash to Richard Foy, 27 August 2019.
18. Interview with Pamela Hall, "The Making of the NZ Archives - Alumna Involved in 1950s-60s". [Fulbright newsletter].
19. 1956. "Notes and News". *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol.1 no.2 (June), p.8.
20. Email, London Metropolitan Archives to Stuart Strachan, 2 June 2021. LMA holds the Society of Archivists' archives.
21. "National Archives", *Report of the Department of Internal Affairs for the Year ending 31 March 1957*, AJHR H.22
22. The first was *A Guide to the Dominion Archives*, published 1953, followed by nine inventories of key early record groups, 1953-61.
23. Judith later became Chief Archivist, 1972-82.
24. Hornabrook, J. 1992. 'Records Centres are Thirty', *New Zealand Archivist*, vol.III no.1 (Autumn/March), p.2.
25. Allan, Ruth M., 1965. *Nelson. A History of Early Settlement*. Wellington: Reed. Edited by J.C. Beaglehole. Ruth had died tragically young in 1958 leaving behind an unfinished manuscript.
26. For those more interested generally in the work of the Archives Committee, see Rogers, F. H. 1957. "Recent Archival Activities in New Zealand". *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol.1 no.4 (August), p.20-28.
27. Cocks, P. 1960. "Business Archives". *Canterbury Chamber of Commerce Economic Bulletin*, no. 425 (May).
28. Maclean, C. 2003. *John Pascoe: author, climber, historian, photographer*. Nelson: Craig Potton. p.252
29. National Archives of New Zealand. 1967. *A Review and Summary of Work 1966*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs.
30. "National Archives", *Report of the Department of Internal Affairs for the Year ending 31 March 1964*, AJHR H.22
31. Cocks, P. S. 1966. "Archives". In *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*. vol.1. p. 78-80. Wellington: Government Printer.
32. Cocks, P. S. 1966. "The Development of the National Archives of New Zealand". *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol.III no.3 (April), p.121-126.
33. She also contributed a shorter article on much the same subject, 1965. "Holdings of the National Archives of New Zealand". *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol.3 no.1 (November), p.10-12.

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34. Cocks, P. 1963. "Obituary: Michael Wordsworth Standish". *Archives. Journal of the British Records Association*. Vol.6 no.29. Reprinted in *Archifacts*. April 2002. p.50-52.
35. National Archives of New Zealand. 1970. *Summary of Work 1969*. Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, [p.1].
36. Obituaries: *Gisborne Herald*, 22 February 2021; *Dominion Post*, 13 February 2021.
37. These were: Hall, P. 1975. "Definitions of Archives and Manuscripts" and "Arrangement and Description of Archives". In *Archives and Manuscripts: A New Zealand Seminar held in Wellington, 21-26 September 1975*. Edited by Hill, R. S. and Hodder, M. D. W. 1977. Wellington: New Zealand Library Association.
38. Email, Rosemary Collier to Stuart Strachan, 31 January 2021, Eulogy for Pamela Hall read at her funeral, 5 February 2021.
39. Email, Rosemary Collier to Stuart Strachan, 2 February 2021.