

Security intelligence records held in Canberra

The Investigation Branch and the Commonwealth Investigation Service

World War I security intelligence was gathered by the Prime Minister's Special Intelligence Bureau, created in 1916. Internal security was more the responsibility of the Commonwealth Police Force, which was formed in December 1917 under the War Precautions Regulations. In 1919 the Police Force was wound down and absorbed into the Special Investigation Bureau. This new agency was known as the Investigation Branch of the Attorney-General's Department and included the Counter Espionage Bureau.

The Investigation Branch was responsible for internal security up to the end of World War II, including internees and prisoners of war. After the war, the Investigation Branch was re-organised and renamed the Commonwealth Investigation Service (CIS).

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation

The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) was formed on 16 March 1949, and assumed responsibility from the CIS for the investigation of activities subversive to the security of Australia. Among its roles were gathering intelligence and surveillance of both individuals and organisations, including the Communist Party of Australia and its members. In taking on these functions, ASIO took responsibility for many CIS records. In April 1960, the remainder of the CIS was absorbed into the newly formed Commonwealth Police Force – now known as the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

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Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Correspondence files, with year prefix (1916–27) & 'C' prefix (1927–53)*</u>	1916–53	A367
<u>Correspondence files of the CIS</u>	1916–60	A8911
<u>Copy of subject list of files in series A8911</u>	prepared 1991	A9105
<u>Miscellaneous security files inherited by ASIO</u>	1916–	A6335
<u>Personal and subject files, 'W' prefix</u>	1919–46	A402

<u>HQ Miscellaneous files – microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and ASIO files</u>	1920–67	A9108
<u>Correspondence files, D series*</u>	1926–45	A369
<u>General correspondence, 'WP' (War Precautions) prefix*</u>	1939–42	A11797
<u>Prisoners of War files, 1939–45*</u>	1939–47	A7919
<u>Personal files</u>	1949–	A6119
<u>Subject files</u>	1949–	A6122
<u>Microfilm copies of personal and subject files (A6119 & A6122)</u>	1949–	A6126
<u>Film and sound recordings</u>	1949–	A8703
<u>Photographic material (including photocopies of photographs)</u>	1949–	A9626
<u>Main correspondence files* (CIS & AFP)</u>	1953–	A1533

*The name index to these series is [A368](#).

How to locate an ASIO record

Using RecordSearch

Unlike other Commonwealth agencies, ASIO is not obliged to send records to the National Archives once they reach 15 years of age. In most instances, records are only transferred in response to applications for access under section 40 of the [Archives Act 1983](#).

Details of the files, films, sound recordings and photographs transferred are entered onto our database, [RecordSearch](#). The database can be searched by keywords such as the surname of an individual or the name of an organisation.

Using indexes

Another method of locating security records is by searching the name index cards, held in series [A368](#). This is an index of names of individuals or organisations which attracted the attention of the CIS before 1949. While the files controlled by this index have been heavily culled over the years, an index reference may lead to a CIS file or occasionally an ASIO or AFP record.

It might also be beneficial to search [A9106](#), which is a list of files in [A9108](#), and [A9105](#), the subject index to [A8911](#).

Access to ASIO records

ASIO is not subject to the *Freedom of Information Act, 1982*. Access to ASIO records is only available through the Archives Act. ASIO records are eligible for public release once they enter the open access period, subject to the exemption of any material of continuing sensitivity as prescribed by section 33 of the Archives Act. This also applies to ASIO's holdings of surveillance films (of events) and photographs (of individuals).

Applying for access

If searching the database and indexes fails to identify records, you should submit an inquiry with our Reference Service. You can also do this in person in any of our research centres.

When submitting an application for ASIO records, it is useful to support it with information, such as:

- full name and date of birth (or approximate year of birth) of the person for whom you are searching;
- any alias they may have been known by;
- city or state/territory where the person lived when of possible ASIO interest;
- reason for possible ASIO interest, eg membership or involvement in political association, participation in demonstrations, association with other persons under surveillance.

Your inquiry will be forwarded to ASIO, who will search its indexes for relevant material. Including as much information as possible will assist ASIO in its search.

Further information about access to records, including your rights to have access decisions reviewed are also available.

Security intelligence records held in other locations

Fact Sheets:

- *Fact sheet 173 - Security intelligence records held in Melbourne*