

Archival terms

During your research at the National Archives you may encounter the following names and terms. Please ask our staff at any time if you need help.

access decision

The decision made by the National Archives under the Archives Act 1983 (sometimes in consultation with agencies) that determines whether a record is open for public access.

agency

Usually an Australian Government department or part of a department which creates records. It can also be an Army base, lighthouse, royal commission, statutory authority, diplomatic post, intelligence agency, Antarctic station, etc. The National Archives identifies each agency by giving it a CA (Commonwealth Agency) number and describing it in the RecordSearch database.

archives

- (i) records that have enduring value for research purposes
- (ii) a building or room where archives are kept
- (iii) an organisation responsible for the care and control of archival material.

citation

A standard format for identifying records – eg National Archives of Australia: K997, 1/15/2 refers to item 1/15/2 from series K997. Refer to *Fact sheet 7 - Citing archival records* for more information.

closed

The access decision of a record that has been withheld from public access under the Archives Act. See also *open* and *open with exception*.

closed period

Records that are not in the open access period, as defined by the Archives Act, are said to be in the closed period and in most cases are not available for public access under the Act (access can be sought under the Freedom of Information Act. See *Fact sheet 110 - When to use the Freedom of Information, Archives and Privacy Acts* for more information). Under the Archives Act records are not available for public access until they enter the open access period. See also *open period*.

Commonwealth Record Series (CRS) system

The cataloguing system used by the National Archives to describe records and to link groups of items (series) to the agencies which created them. See *Fact sheet 6 - The Commonwealth Record Series (CRS) System* for more information.

exempt information

Sensitive information defined in section 33 of the Archives Act (eg personal or security related information) which may be withheld from public access beyond the open access period. See *Fact sheet 46 – Why we refuse access* for more information.

expunge

To delete exempt information from a copy of a record in order to make the remainder of the record available for public access.

extant

A term used by archivists to describe records that remain or have survived to the present (ie records that have not been destroyed or lost).

finding aid

A reference tool created by the National Archives to help staff and researchers find records. Examples include RecordSearch, item lists, fact sheets, guides.

folio

Usually a single sheet of a file, folder, volume, etc.

item

The smallest discrete unit in a recordkeeping system which, with others, forms a series. An item is usually a file but can be a volume, map, plan, photograph, computer disc, etc.

item list

A list of items within a series usually providing the item number, title and date range. Item lists are one of the National Archives' main manual finding aids.

internal reconsideration

The first stage of the appeal process in which you may apply to the National Archives for review of a decision to wholly or partially refuse access to a record. You have a legal right to request such a review. See *Fact sheet 12 – What to do if we refuse you access* for more information.

open

The access decision of a record that has been opened for public access under the Archives Act. See also *closed* and *open with exception*.

open period

Records created within the open access period, as defined by the Archives Act, are said to be in the open period. The Archives Act provides a statutory right of access to these records. See also *closed period*.

open with exception (OWE)

The access decision of a record, part of which has been withheld from public access. See also *open* and *closed*.

PhotoSearch

An image bank available on the National Archives website which contains images from the National Archives photographic collections.

researcher card

A numbered pass issued to researchers using original records in the research centre.

research centre

The area where public and official researchers view records.

RecordSearch

A database available on the National Archives website that lets you search for information about records held in the National Archives collection. This information currently comprises descriptions

of 9000 creators/depositors and over 8 million record items (about 10% of the items in the collection).

reference copy

A microfilm or other copy of a record made to protect a fragile original or to make the record available in more than one research centre.

research agent

A person employed and paid to do research on behalf of another.

researcher

Any member of the public using the National Archives information services.

series

A group of similar records usually kept together because they result from the same activity. The National Archives identifies each series by giving each a CRS (Commonwealth Record Series) number and describing it in the RecordSearch database.

top numbering

The renumbering and intersorting of items into a more recent series or their integration into another agency's recordkeeping system.

withheld pending advice (WPA)

A temporary restriction on public access pending advice on whether a record contains exempt information.