

Libraries	12
Municipal Corporations of England and Wales.....	118

Total..... 291

A glance at this list will show very clearly the nature of the investigation, and the wide field it covered. The greater part of the information regarding the state of the public repositories is of only local interest, but the summary of the inquiries on this head may be quoted as a useful warning against the dangers to be avoided in Canada. The Commissioners say: "The buildings are inconvenient in point of situation—ill-adapted to the purposes to which they are applied—some of them crowded to an excess which renders the use of the records extremely difficult, and none of them provided with sufficient accommodation for that purpose; that some of them are exposed to risk of fire, and others to certain destruction by damp; and that there are large masses of records in depositories which are avowedly only temporary, and for which, sooner or later, some permanent place of deposit must be provided."

How this state of things had come to exist is clearly shown:—

1. Buildings had been used not erected for the purpose, and it was difficult, if not impossible, to adapt them "to purposes so peculiar in their nature as storing the national records, and affording suitable apartments for transacting the business relating to them."

2. The rapid increase of some of the most valuable and important documents "has occasioned such a demand for the utmost possible economy of space, that the records are placed in situations where the access to them is difficult, and from which even the light of the sun is excluded." The practice of placing them in vaults, and underground recesses, at once damp and dark, is condemned, and the danger from fire is called attention to, in the most emphatic manner.

Much of the report is taken up with questions concerning the publication of calendars, indexes and the documents themselves, and the important subject of improvements in the preservation and management of the records. The Commissioners say on this point: "The introduction of a system of uniform management appears to us, we confess, hopeless in the present state of the records and offices; and we see in the necessity for the adoption of some such general system of management, an additional and very urgent reason for the adoption of a plan which we now beg to submit to Your Majesty."

That plan was substantially the one now in existence. The report was presented to William IV on the 7th February, 1837. He having died in June following, the matter was taken up in the first year of Her Majesty's reign, and on the 14th August, 1838 the Act (1 and 2 Vic. cap. 94) for keeping safely the public records was assented to.

The Act being easily accessible, I shall merely state that the preamble sets out that public records being in the keeping of several persons, and being kept in unfit buildings, it is expedient to establish one Record Office and a better custody, and to allow of the free use of the records, so far as stands with their safety and integrity, and with the public policy of the realm; and that the records in a large number of offices, courts and other places (of which a list is given; power being taken by the 2nd section to include other offices) are to be under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls for the time being. 3rd provides for the transfer of accumulating records in the places named to the custody of the Master of the Rolls. The other clauses relate to the establishment, maintenance and management of the office; the appointment of Deputy and Assistant Keepers, &c. The interpretation clause I have already given.

As the title "Keeper of Records" frequently occurs, it may be, perhaps, not unnecessary to notice a mis-apprehension that seems to exist with regard to it. It does not designate a clerk in charge of the record room of a Department to keep clean and see that the papers are accessible, a duty very satisfactorily discharged in several of the Departments at Ottawa by an intelligent messenger. On the contrary, it designates one of the most honourable and responsible offices in