

Reference Guide 7: Railways

Summary

This reference guide gives a brief overview of the railways records held in Archives New Zealand's Christchurch Regional Office which relate to the activities of New Zealand Railways (and its predecessors and successors) in the Canterbury, West Coast, Otago and Southland Regions.

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Introduction

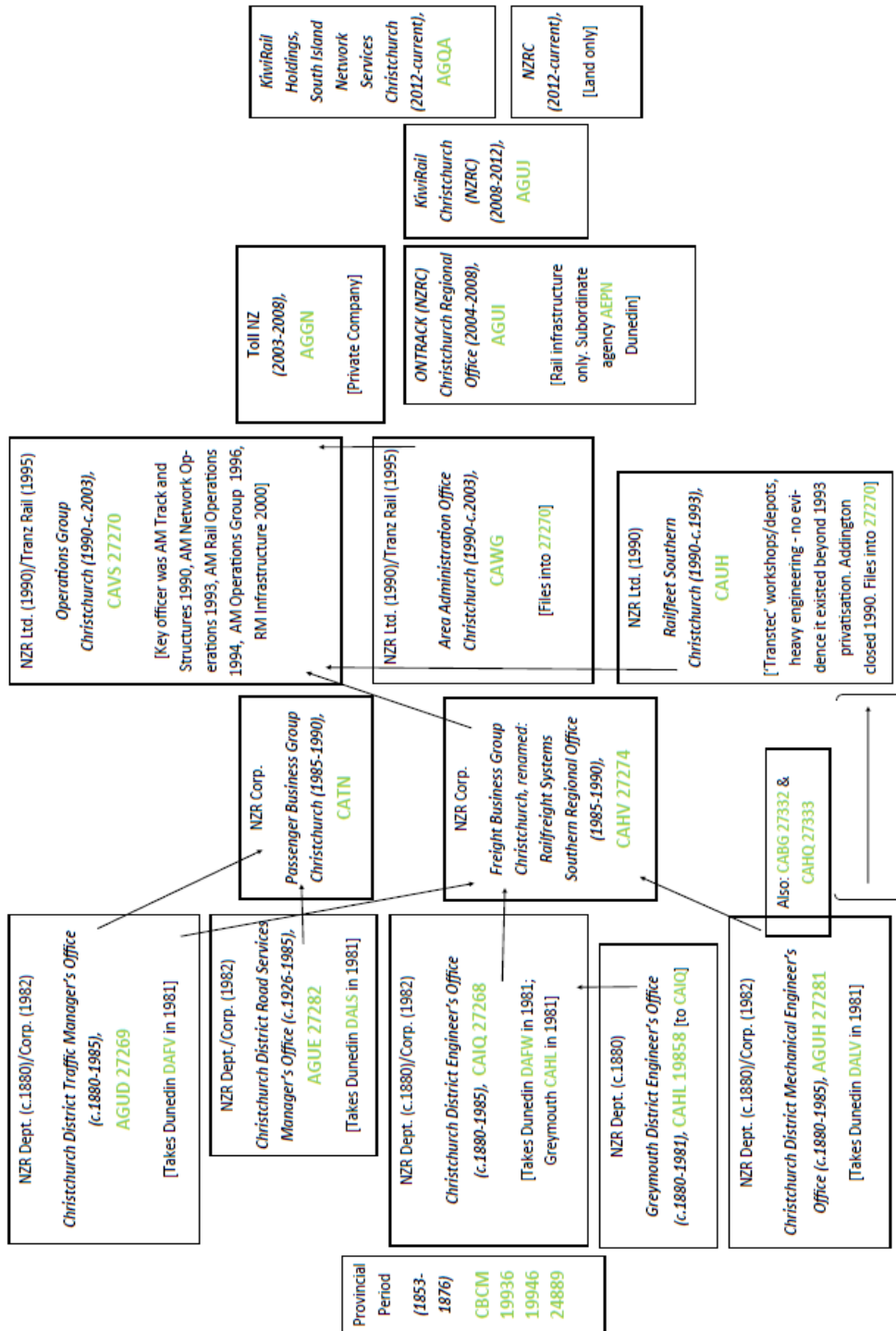
Overview of Railways Holdings

Archives New Zealand’s Christchurch Regional Office has extensive holdings of records documenting the development and management of railways in the South Island (especially in the Canterbury and Westland regions), dating from the Provincial Period (1853-1876) to the present day. This guide discusses each of the key records series (groups of records) held, and the government agencies that created them – including offices of the Canterbury Provincial Government, New Zealand Railways (NZR), and NZR’s successors (e.g. Tranz Rail, KiwiRail etc.). Other railways material held by the Christchurch and Wellington Offices, including digitised material, is also covered.

Chart of Railways Agencies & Series Relationships

The arrows on the chart below give an indication of NZR's evolution in the South Island, and how responsibilities (and records) flowed through the organisation over time. The letters highlighted in green are the Archives NZ agency codes for each office, while the numbers are the series codes which will enable you to find the associated records on Archway. *The bulk of material relating to Otago/Southland railways activity is available via our Dunedin Office.*

Chart of Railways Agencies & Series — Christchurch



Searching Agencies & Records Series on Archway

You will find Archives NZ agency codes relating to the various railways offices, and series codes relating to the archival material that we hold from these offices, throughout this guide. Agency codes consist of four letters, and series codes are numerical – you can see examples of these highlighted in green on the chart in this guide.

In order to find out more information about an agency (office) or series (group of records which belong together), you can conduct an advanced search on Archway, our online holdings database.

 www.archway.archives.govt.nz

To do this, choose the ‘advanced search’ option on the front page of Archway, and then select either the agency box, or the series box, on the diagram which loads. On the next page, enter the applicable code into the ‘code’ search field at the top of the page, and click the search button. When the result loads, click the hyperlink ‘more details’ to view the full agency/series description, or a list of all the records belonging to the agency/series.

In order to search for material within a series, choose the ‘advanced search’ option again, and click on the records box in the diagram which loads. Once the search fields load, narrow your search by entering the appropriate series code in the series box (e.g. 27268 for the Christchurch District Engineer’s Office file series), and then keywords relating to your research interest (e.g. Lyttelton Station), and perhaps a year range for the era of material you are seeking. When using keywords, remember to keep things relatively broad in order to capture the most material; a particularly good strategy is to use an asterisk which functions as a wild card for Archway searches (e.g. if you are interested in tunnels, entering the keyword ‘tunnel*’ will capture files with titles including the words tunnel and tunnelling). This is a good strategy to use even when conducting a ‘simple search’.

If you need further advice on conducting Archway searches, please do not hesitate to ask an archivist. More information is also available via our website:

 www.archives.govt.nz/search-the-archive/researching/using-our-online-search

Notes on NZR Files

Most of the files adhere to NZR’s multiple number records classification system, in which stations were allocated unique numbers, and standard subject numbers dealt with various aspects of the network’s interests (e.g. sidings and yards, signalling and interlocking etc.). Alpha prefixes were given to specific file types, e.g. ‘PS’ (private siding), ‘S’ (station), ‘B’ (bridge) and so on. The classification system changed from time to time, which meant that many of the files were subject to top-numbering/re-covering. Where possible, prior numbering has been recorded in the ‘description’ field of individual item listings.

It is clear that files were often passed between, and added to by, different offices within the Railways Department in Christchurch (and indeed, around the South Island), so there is some overlap in terms of content between the various offices' files series. This is particularly so in the case of the Christchurch District Traffic Manager's Office and the Christchurch District Engineer's Office files series.

In some instances, material on some of the files in a particular agency's associated series might post-date the agency – in these cases, the files were only minimally added to by successor agencies, so the decision was made to return these files to their original series, despite the date discrepancy. Where existing files were significantly added to by a successor agency, they have been left in the successor agency's file series, but where possible, their prior numbering (if also reclassified) and provenance have been recorded in the 'description' field of individual item listings.

Key Canterbury & Westland Railways Agencies & Records Series

Canterbury Provincial Government Railways Office

The Railways Office, headed by the Secretary for Railways, was established in 1868 to deal with railways matters for the Canterbury Provincial Government. Prior to this the responsibility for railways activities in the province had been held by the Secretary for Public Works, and before that, by the Provincial Secretary.

The Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Railways [ICR], series 24889, contains the correspondence received by the Railways Office concerning the construction, management and maintenance of railways in the province. From 1868-1874, every item of inwards correspondence was logged in a numerical register [Archives Reference: CH287, CP 467] by the Office as it was received, and each letter numbered accordingly in blue ink. The ten boxes of surviving correspondence cover all facets of railways activities during the period, and each letter is listed individually on Archway with the name of the writer, and the subject matter it concerns. The material includes several railway plans. The Railways Office Outwards Letterbooks (1868-1876) [Archives References: CH287, CP 496 – CP499] contain the correspondence generated by the Office.

Earlier Canterbury Provincial railways material (and indeed, significant additional material from the 1868-1876 period) can be found within the Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Public Works [ICPW], series 19946, and the Inwards Correspondence to the Provincial Secretary [ICPS], series 19936. Notable material includes letters concerning the formation in the 1850s of a Railways Commission for the Province, and letters detailing the construction of the Lyttelton Tunnel. Railway plans can also be found within these

correspondence series. The corresponding Outwards Letterbooks of the Secretary for Public Works [Archives References: CH287, CP469 – CP495] and the Provincial Secretary [Archives References: CH287, CP415 – CP440] are also extant.

Some railways correspondence was removed from the original series described above and brought together in 'Special Subject Files'. Subjects covered in these files include the Lyttelton to Christchurch Railway, the Great Southern Railway, South Canterbury railways, and the Northern Railway. To find these items on Archway, you will need to conduct an advanced search on Archway – choosing the 'records' path. When the search fields load, type 'special subject rail*' in the keywords box, and in the accession box type 'CH287', and click on the search button at the bottom of the form.

Christchurch District Engineer's Office [NZR]

Agency Code: CAIQ

Agency Dates: c.1880-1985

Series Number: 27268

Date of Material: 1879-2009

The Christchurch District Engineer was responsible for the maintenance, inspections, and general management of bridges, tunnels and earthworks, yards and sidings, station buildings and platforms, railway tracks and land, leases and property in the Canterbury region. In 1981, the Christchurch District Engineer took over responsibility for these functions in the Otago, Southland, and West Coast regions. The Christchurch District Engineer reported to the Chief Civil Engineer in Wellington.

The files within the Christchurch District Engineer's Office series, 27268, cover the following four subjects:

1. Tunnels, bridges and earthworks:

Records relating to the infrastructure that carries the permanent way (railway track) through hills and over rivers and protects it from the environment. The files document the maintenance (they were generally constructed by the Public Works Department and handed over to Railways) of these structures enabling passage of the railway line. They can include inspection reports, proposals for alterations, historical records of construction and repair, as well as records of routine maintenance, and they were filed together.

2. Stations and yards:

These records relate to the construction and maintenance of railway stations and their surrounding areas and properties, including sheds, wharves, passenger and goods yards, sidings, railway houses, drainage, signalling arrangements and power supply. Over the years each station acquired a range of related files whose breadth depended on the importance of

the station. Stations were given unique numbers and the main files were stored with their related component files, which were given standardised classification numbers.

3. Permanent way (railway track and land management):

Files relating to the condition and maintenance of the railway line itself, services crossing the rail line, as well as adjacent property. The records include land acquisition, routine track inspection reports, track repair or replacement documentation, track maintenance equipment correspondence, sleepers and ballast, as well as documentation of services crossing the railway lines - such as power lines, maintenance of trees and bushes encroaching on the line, permits to enter or use Railway property, fire protection correspondence, Town and Country Planning files.

4. Branch lines and private sidings:

Files relating to applications for, construction and demise of, and significant details about private sidings, which have usually been constructed at the request of private firms to allow the easy transportation of goods to the market. Examples would be the numerous sidings in Canterbury to flour and flax mills as well as freezing works. It also covers files documenting the construction and demise of lines other than the main trunk lines. These branch lines can be quite short, such as the line from Greymouth to Rewanui, or regionally significant, such as the Stillwater to Westport line.

Greymouth District Engineer's Office [NZR]

Agency Code: CAHL

Agency Dates: c.1880-1981

Series Number: 19858

Date of Material: c.1880-1981

The Greymouth District Engineer's Office was responsible for the management, planning and maintenance of the permanent way, plant and buildings throughout Nelson and the West Coast. Established in the 1880s, the Office was the headquarters for the Maintenance Branch of NZR for the Westland District, and by 1905 its staff consisted of a District Engineer, a Foreman of Works, Bridge Inspector, Chief Clerk and four clerks, several draughtsmen, and 27 work gangs. Lines on the West Coast were progressively shut down in the 1970s, and the Office was absorbed by the Christchurch District Engineer's Office in 1981.

The files within the Greymouth District Engineer's Office series, 19858, document the many functions and processes carried out by the Office as they managed NZR's track, land, plant, and other infrastructure in the region – the material ranges from files covering minutiae such as cattle stops, to correspondence, lease files, and annual reports.

Christchurch District Traffic Manager's Office [NZR]

Agency Code: AGUD

Agency Dates: c.1880-1985

Series Number: 27269

Date of Material: 1877-1999

The Christchurch District Traffic Manager was responsible for the management of train traffic in the top of the South Island, including the Canterbury, West Coast, Nelson, and Marlborough regions. This entailed ensuring the efficiency of all matters relating to train running, wagon supply and train control throughout these regions. The Office also had responsibility for checking signal systems, operating equipment and facilities, station premises, yards, sidings and stockyards. In 1981, it absorbed its counterpart in Dunedin, and became responsible for the management of train traffic across the entirety of the South Island. A 1985 restructure saw the absorption of this Office's functions by the Southern Regional Office of the new Freight Business Group division, soon after rebranded Railfreight Systems.

The bulk of the files within the Christchurch District Traffic Manager's Office series, 27269, relate to the passage of trains in the top half of the South Island, including timetable information, derailment and accident reports, rules and regulations, manuals, complaints, correspondence and reports regarding traffic control and decisions about individual trains. Other files relate to the Office's inspection activities (signals, equipment etc.). There are also files, dealing with the same subject matter, but in Otago and Southland, which were transferred to the Christchurch Office from the Dunedin Office when it closed.

Christchurch District Mechanical Engineer's Office [NZR]

Agency Code: AGUH

Agency Dates: c.1880-1985

Series Number: 27281

Date of Material: c.1880-1985

The Christchurch District Mechanical Engineer's Office was responsible for the provision and management of locomotives and railway rolling stock, including the management of workshops, in the top of the South Island. From 1981 onwards, the Office also took responsibility for these functions in the Otago and Southland regions, as it absorbed its counterpart office in Dunedin. A 1985 restructure saw the absorption of this Office's functions by the Southern Regional Office of the new Freight Business Group division, soon after rebranded Railfreight Systems.

The workshops for which the Office was responsible included the Addington Workshops in Christchurch – a major facility principally responsible for building new locomotives (including

the first ever produced by New Zealand Railways - the W192 in 1889) and later on for the manufacture and overhaul of rolling stock, and also the Greymouth (Elmer Lane) Workshops and the Westport Workshops. These latter two, minor facilities, did not manufacture locomotives, but they did carry out major overhauls of them.

The files within the Christchurch District Mechanical Engineer's Office series, 27281, cover subjects such as locomotive building, maintenance, operation and crewing, workshop operations, inspections of rolling stock and freight-handling equipment, and construction and maintenance of the overhead electric traction system throughout the top of the South Island. There are also files, dealing with the same subject matter, but in Otago and Southland, which were transferred to the Christchurch Office from the Dunedin Office when it closed.

Greymouth (Elmer Lane) Workshops [NZR]

Agency Code: CABG

Agency Dates: c.1928-c.1986

Series Number: 27332

Date of Material: 1888-1986

The NZR Greymouth Workshops at Elmer Lane were responsible for major locomotive overhauls, and routine maintenance of locomotives and railway rolling stock. The Workshops opened in 1928 and operated until their closure in the 1980s.

The material within the Greymouth (Elmer Lane) Workshops series, 27332, was directly transferred to National Archives (Archives NZ) upon the Workshops' closure. It includes a Register of Blue Prints (1888-1945), Greymouth Workshop Committee Meeting Minutes (1927-1964) and Workshops' Council Meeting Minutes (1965-1986), and files relating to major locomotive overhauls and routine maintenance work on locomotives and rolling stock undertaken (1950s-1980s).

Westport Workshops [NZR]

Agency Code: CAHQ

Agency Dates: 1880-1984

Series Number: 27333

Date of Material: 1890-1982

NZR's Westport Workshops were responsible for major locomotive overhauls, and routine maintenance of locomotives and railway rolling stock. They were established in 1880 and operated until their closure in the 1980s.

The material within the Westport Workshops series, 27333, was directly transferred to National Archives (Archives NZ) upon the Workshops' closure in 1984. It includes Registers of

Correspondence (1932-1976), Workshops' Council Meeting Minutes (1968-1980), and files relating to major locomotive overhauls and routine maintenance work on locomotives and rolling stock undertaken (1890s-1980s), including information relating to staff.

Christchurch District Road Services Manager's Office [NZR]

Agency Code: AGUE

Agency Dates: c.1926-1985

Series Number: 27282

Date of Material: c.1926-1991

The Christchurch District Road Services Manager's Office was responsible for the operation of NZR's road passenger coach and omnibus services, road freight services, and the maintenance of most of NZR's road vehicles in the top of the South Island. The Office reported to the head of the Road Services Branch in Wellington, and had a number of smaller area offices (e.g. Hokitika) answering to it. From 1981 structural changes brought the equivalent office in Dunedin under the Christchurch Office's control, and a further restructure in 1985 saw the Christchurch Office become the Passenger Business Group, Christchurch.

The files within the Christchurch District Road Services Manager's Office series, 27282, document the acquisition/contracting of the routes and bus fleets of several private operators, the management of tourist coach services, road passenger and goods freighting services on short and long-distance routes throughout the South Island (the material in series 27269 is also closely related, and often duplicated in this series).

Railfreight Systems Southern Regional Office [NZR]

Agency Code: CAHV

Agency Dates: 1985-1990

Series Number: 27274

Date of Material: 1970-1999

Railfreight Systems Southern was responsible for the way and works, mechanical, traffic and freight operations of the railways throughout the South Island from 1985. The restructure of NZR in 1985, saw the incorporation of the former Christchurch District Engineer's Office, the Christchurch District Mechanical Engineer's Office, and the larger part of the Christchurch District Traffic Manager's Office into the new, Freight Business Group, Christchurch. NZR soon rebranded the new office Railfreight Systems. A restructure in 1990 saw all these functions, excluding the oversight of mechanical operations (henceforth undertaken by the new Railfleet Southern entity), passed to the newly formed Operations Group, Christchurch.

The files in the Railfreight Systems series, 27274, relate to all the responsibilities of the Office outlined above. Some of them originated in the Christchurch District Engineer's Office but were subsequently significantly added to (and sometimes also top-numbered, or re-covered) by Railfreight Systems. Prior numbering and provenance have been recorded in the 'description' field of individual item listings to account for this. Other files in the series, originated by Railfreight Systems, were subsequently added to by its successor agency (the Operations Group, Christchurch, of New Zealand Rail Limited), however as the additions were only minimal, they have remained in this series.

Christchurch Operations Group [NZR/Tranz Rail]

Agency Code: CAVS

Agency Dates: 1990-c.2003

Series Number: 27270

Date of Material: 1979-2001

The Christchurch Operations Group was responsible for the traffic, way and works, and freight operations of the railways in the South Island from 1990. In 1990, with the sale (and extensive restructure) of NZR, the Operations Group, Christchurch was created. The Office continued operation until its parent, Tranz Rail Limited, was sold to Toll Holdings in 2003. The Office was controlled by an Area Manager throughout its lifespan, however the exact title of this key officer changed over time, from Area Manager Track and Structures (1990), to Area Manager Network Operations (1993), to Area Manager Rail Operations (1994), to Area Manager Operations Group (1996), and finally, to Regional Manager Infrastructure (2000).

The files in the Christchurch Operations Group series, 27270, relate to all the responsibilities of the Office outlined above. Some of these files originated in the Christchurch District Engineer's Office and Railfreight Systems Southern Regional Office but were subsequently significantly added to (and sometimes also top-numbered, or re-covered) by the Operations Group. Prior numbering and provenance have been recorded in the 'description' field of individual item listings to account for this. There are also a few files within the series which contain material solely from the corresponding office in Wellington, one or two others which derived from the Area Administration Office (Christchurch) which reported to the Operations Group (Christchurch), and finally a few files from Railfleet Southern (the entity responsible for heavy engineering services in the region, which appears to have closed in 1993). Given the very small volume of material concerned, and the fact that the Operations Group likely had oversight of the material prior to its eventual transfer to KiwiRail, and then to Archives New Zealand, Christchurch, it seemed practical that these files be serialised here.

Other Sources

Miscellaneous Railways Material

In addition to the several large series of railways records outlined above, it is worth also perusing the railways-related maps/plans that we hold from the regional offices of agencies such as the Ministry of Works [e.g. Archives References: Accessions CH86, CH169, CH495].

We also hold a small collection of railways memorabilia assembled by Danish railway engineer Jorgen Borgen, who worked on sections of the New Zealand Midland Railway in Westland c.1885 - c.1890 (including photographs) [Archives Reference: Accession CH1024].

NZR Staff Material

Those looking for information about NZR staff may wish to visit/contact our Head Office in Wellington in order to conduct research into their extensive holdings of NZR personnel records – particularly the staff service schedules [Archives References: Series 589 & 17476]. They also hold bound copies of the annual personnel lists covering most years from 1898-1980. Railways personnel lists can also be found in official publications such as the Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR) (lists covering 1889-1925), and the New Zealand Gazettes (lists covering 1926-1941) – the former publication is now available online:

 www.atojs.natlib.govt.nz

NZR Photographs Online

Staff at our Head Office in Wellington are progressively digitising and making available online their extensive collection of NZR photographic negatives. Many of the images are already available for viewing and downloading via Archway [Archives Reference: Series 6390]. In order to search for images of interest to you within this series, see **Searching Agencies & Records Series on Archway** at the beginning of this guide.

 www.archway.archives.govt.nz

Summary List of Key Series

1. Canterbury Provincial Government (1853 - 1876):

Inwards Correspondence to the Provincial Secretary [ICPS] [Series: 19936]

Provincial Secretary Outwards Letterbooks [Accession/Record #: CH287, CP 415 – CP 440]

Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Public Works [ICPW] [Series: 19946]

Secretary for Public Works Outwards Letterbooks [Accession/Record #: CH287, CP 469 – CP 495]

Inwards Correspondence of the Secretary for Railways [ICR] [Series: 24889]

Railways Office Outwards Letterbooks [Accession/Record #: CH287, CP 496 – CP 499]

2. New Zealand Railways & Successors (c.1880 - Present):

District Engineer's Office Christchurch (Railways) Registered Files [Series: 27268]

District Engineer's Office Greymouth (Railways) Registered Files [Series: 19858]

District Traffic Manager's Office Christchurch (Railways) Registered Files [Series: 27269]

District Mechanical Engineer's Office Christchurch (Railways) Registered Files [Series: 27281]

Greymouth (Elmer Lane) Workshops (Railways) Registered Files and Misc. Material [Series: 27332]

Westport Workshops (Railways) Registered Files and Misc. Material [Series: 27333]

District Road Services Manager's Office Christchurch (Railways) Registered Files [Series: 27282]

Railfreight Systems Regional Office Southern Registered Files [Series: 27274]

Operations Group, Christchurch (Railways) Registered Files [Series: 27270]



*West Coast express awaits departure from Christchurch station early in the morning, 28.03.1950
[Archives Reference: R25562568]*

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