

In Pursuit of Provenance : when Societal met Parallel with a view to Relationships

Chris Hurley

Paper given for Australian Society of Archivists in Adelaide – 21 June, 2013 – in a joint session with Michael Piggott on Societal Provenance and reprised (solo) in Sydney – 17 July, 2013.

This presentation was my contribution to an Adelaide symposium, conducted by the South Australian Branch of the ASA, looking at Michael Piggott's book, *Societal Provenance*. I repeated it (without Michael) in Sydney a month later for a NSW Branch event.

I began by introducing the audience to the meaning of “parallel provenance” – for which I think I can claim paternity – because I've seen other people using it in ways that don't conform to my intention. It is an extension of the theoretical concept enunciated by Peter Scott in his writings on the “series system” basing a descriptive methodology on the recognition that series can, and often do, have “multiple provenance”. In Peter's classic statement of the concept, published in *American Archivist* in 1966, **multiple provenance** arises when two or more agents of creation generate a record (viz. series) over time – one succeeding another. In the traditional analysis, the two or more agents of creation exist within the same contextual framework (what I call their Ambience). Two creators succeeding each other, in respect of the records they successively generate, are assumed to belong to the same ambience (organisation). Otherwise, their existence and character would not be synchronised and a clean-cut succession would become confused.

Provenance	Time period	Ambience
Multiple	Different	Same
Simultaneous multiple	Same	Same
Parallel	Same	Different

When I knew him, Peter was already beginning to grapple with the notion of **simultaneous multiple provenance** – viz. two or more agents of creation generating a series (an instance of what I would now call a Document) in the same time-frame, not successively. I have described examples of this in some of my writings. Generally, these were still within the same ambience or context, albeit an ambience that might have to be broadened to accommodate it. The notion of **parallel provenance** takes the idea to the next stage and explores simultaneous generation of the record when the agents of creation cannot be (or have not been) brought together within a common contextual framework. Descriptively, this occurs when records-creating entities for the same record(s) cannot be linked as belonging to the same contextual entity. I have emphasised repeatedly that parallel provenance, thus defined, is a problem rather than a solution. If contextual description is sufficiently broad to begin with, or is broadened when necessary, there would be no parallel provenance - only simultaneous multiple provenance.

Since provenance is historically focussed (perhaps too narrowly) on the act of creating or generating records, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by it. I believe (and have many times stated) that we need new (and better) definitions of these fundamental concepts and that they must be derived collectively not just propounded by someone like me – but no one seems to be much interested. In the meantime, here is a re-definition of “create” in a way that facilitates re-imagining provenance to fit in things like parallel or societal provenance :

Any other¹ entity (like or unlike) that integrates the entity being described with other entities or which shapes, tempers or brings about a situation, action, or state of being from which it results.²

¹ Other than the entity being described, that is. The assumption is that a Doer or a Deed can be shown as “creating” a Document and a Document can also. It would be interesting to see this assumption challenged.

² This definition attempts to redefine “create” to encompass most contextualising relationships between entities.

What is being defined here is the **relationship** that subsists between an entity that creates or generates another. It is not a definition of the entity itself (a Doer should not be defined as a creator, for example, simply recognised as an entity that is capable of creation). Nor is it a description of characteristics of an entity. It is a relationship only.

Societal Provenance

For the purpose of the Adelaide meeting, societal provenance was defined in terms borrowed from Tom Nesmith in “The concept of societal provenance and records of nineteenth-century Aboriginal–European relations in Western Canada: implications for archival theory and practice” *Archival Science* (2006) 6:351–360, published online: 5 June 2007 :

- Some archivists have moved away from the idea that provenance is above all a single person or institution—expressed largely in the central act of literally inscribing records—and towards a multifaceted view, as expressed in the Australian series system, continuum, and postmodern theories, which suggest that **records are the product of a variety of factors acting across their entire history**—from literal inscription through to archival actions with records, and even to readings of the records in archives by their users.
- The **societal dimensions of record creation** and archiving still remain a largely marginal feature of archival concern. They should be a more explicitly developed and integral part of archival theory and practice.

For the Sydney audience, I attempted to summarise some of the matters discussed in Adelaide :

- **Michael’s Book** : ? What is it that has societal provenance? Is it the archives institutions or their contents? Societal provenance, often invisible, changes how we see things : how we regard the work of the archivist and also how we regard the archives he/she works with.
- **Theorising** : The value of theoretical constructs (championed by MP). Heartily endorsed by CH. The antonym is “applied” not “practical”. You can go on applying unvarying methods without a theory until it comes time to re-engineer them (CH), then, without a sound theoretical base you are all at sea.
- **Mechanics** : We are still working out what it is and what it means (MP). The poetry of the continuum (MP thinks) does not pin things down. Poetry of societal provenance (CH thinks) is fuzzy. What does societal provenance mean for actual descriptions in actual finding aids (CH)? Applied to parallel provenance, is it a source for alternative ambience statements when documenting cross-jurisdictional parallel provenance?
- **Limits** : My friend Susan Healy’s reaction on first hearing about parallel provenance : “Hmmm, subjects!”. Different frameworks can be used to separate truth and fiction. Example from Michael’s book : the story of Bob Hawke’s escapade in swimming the breaststroke in a 6” deep pond at University House. Provenance cannot be extended indefinitely and remain true to fundamental archival theory. CH : involved parties (a provenance entity must be involved in some way in the “action”) and the rule of three (it must be conferred directly or, if vicariously, by only one degree of separation).
- **Archival afterlife** : The Sword of William Wallace is a hilt and a blade renewed many times – it may not even be his sword to start with but it is accepted as such and therefore is “his” sword as an emblem of what he stands for (faith vs history). Opening the archives on-line to a “wall” (cf. Tim Sharratt) on which involved parties can add their own inscriptions to the record? Who can play? Benefits and dangers!
- **Not so hard** : As with functions, once we start to evolve them as descriptive entities, we will find that a lot of societal ambience is already documented in our existing descriptions. It’s just a matter of digging it out and reformatting as entities.
- **Is it our job?** : Some highly significant series (e.g. 1914-1918 AIF personnel dossiers CRS B2455) and genres (e.g. Torrens title) warrant much richer provenance data. This tends to be

done by historians and journalists, not archivists (e.g. Anne Frank's diary). Is this division of labour a safeguard or a limitation?

- **Emotional ambience** : Should we try to embody into our descriptions the deep anguish or high elation felt by users? CH says no. We can describe the triggers for those feelings but not capture them. My example is the almost Freudian display of grief counselling in Chaucer's *Boke of the Duchess*, where the poet doesn't try to express the feeling of loss but brings out the feelings of the grieving lord by encouraging him to speak of it. [This example was lost on most since no one had even heard of Chaucer's poem, let alone read it.]

Inevitably, this list reflects matters that interested me and they may not reflect what actually occurred.

Parallel Provenance

My presentation of parallel provenance involved an example dating back to my time in the U.K. in 1974/75 when I was there completing a Graduate Diploma in Archives Studies at London University. In addition to spending time on two practicums as part of the course, I visited a lot of record offices on my own account and collected a few published finding aids on sale there. I was impressed by their thoroughness and scholarship and one from East Sussex, the *Danny Archives*, was the basis for this presentation. Danny was a great house of the neighbourhood which had, I have always assumed, recently gone the way of many such establishments in the decade or so before I came to visit the Record Office. The archives, I imagine, had recently been transferred and the book I purchased had only been published a few years earlier.



DANNY IN HURSTPIERPOINT : EAST FRONT AND SOUTH SIDE

These stately homes are, for an Australian tourist, attractions of great interest – curiosities symbolising what is ancient and enduring in the British landscape. Visiting them is one of the things we come to Britain for. I had come to the U.K. believing, what was said in the literature and what was accepted at home, that the “series system” was the result of unusually unstable conditions in Australian government administration. It was not needed overseas because other jurisdictions were stable, unchanging, and free of antipodean volatility. It did not take me long to realise that this was rubbish. What I saw was administrative structures and patterns of organised behaviour that were, if anything, more chaotic and varying than anything we had to deal with in Canberra. I saw this as much in private archives as in official records. I concluded that British archivists were in denial. Many years later, I came to understand that this was true of non-government archives in Australia also – corporate, trade union, and personal.

I understood this better as I acquired insights into the history of English country estates. They were not enduring relics of primordial social life stretching back to invisible origins, but precisely located in the time and place in which they came into being, flourished, and then declined. This societal ambience gave character and meaning to the phenomenon and, hence, to the records that were associated with it. I am no expert in English social history but here is what I believe to be a credible account of the era of the great house derived from easily accessed sources :

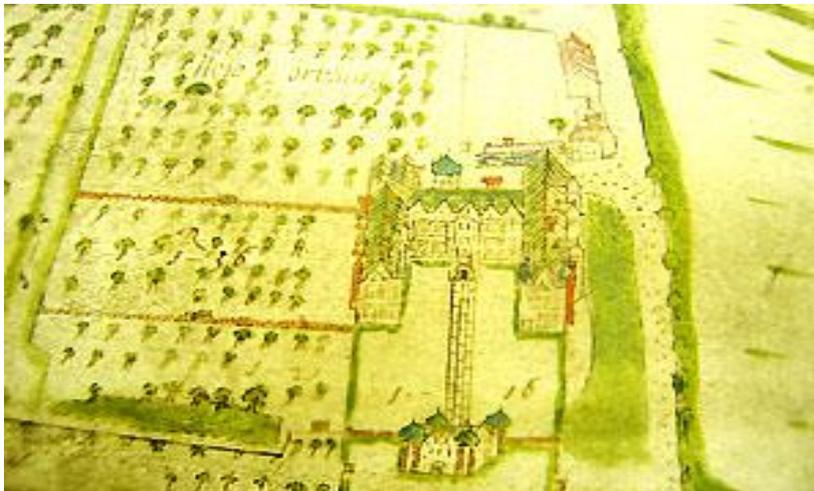
- **<1500 (manors and monasteries)** : In the age of “bastard feudalism” great lords assign estates to their retainers in return for fealty. At this time, the rural landscape was also dominated by the church which was a major landholder employing many rural workers and dispensing charity.
- **1500-1750 (private estates, enclosures and sheep)** : With the Reformation comes spoliation of church lands and the growth of secular estates. This is the first great period of enclosure of common land, sheep replace small farming in many places, productivity is increased by deforestation and draining the fens. Estate owners, engorged on church property, acquire multiple holdings and become landlords. Tenant (yeoman) farmers actually work the land and the owners live off the rents. Agricultural labourers become part of the social pyramid on the farms. The owners employ estate workers (in the house, home farm and on the grounds). Villages attached to or dominated by great house employ blacksmiths, shopkeepers, tradesmen, etc.). Improvements produce better yields and greater wealth.
- **1750-1850 (these are the fat days)** : Population triples in a century! More improvements are made to increase productivity and yield and there is a new wave of enclosures. The great families enjoy immense riches, dominating political and social life. They can afford to go in for landscaping and (re)building the stately homes. Come the industrial revolution and the canner landowners invest while their fellows stand by and watch a new commercial class arise. The beginnings of rural depopulation occur with farm industrialisation. It is an era of imperial expansion; wealth can be made in trade and commerce as well as land and in overseas plantations using slave labour. New wealth adds to the pressure for parliamentary reform by the new money.
- **1850-1950 (refrigeration and social revolution)** : As wealth was extended beyond the great landowners, their wealthier tenants sought protection in tenants’ rights legislation. Some landowners reacted by resuming leases and undertaking “big farming”. Then land values crashed with the introduction of refrigeration and a resulting influx of colonial products, including meat and dairy. Some landowners, already running a high debt with land as collateral, were ruined; others, unable to adjust to reduced income and higher costs, went into decline. Increased taxes and death duties introduced by Lloyd George added to the pressure. World War I precipitated a social revolution and inaugurated the end of service in the great houses as servants became unaffordable.
- **1950 + (ruin and renewal)** : By 1945, the estates have become unsustainable. By now Downton has been sold or ruined. Land goes cheap and is taken up by investment bankers, stockbrokers, pop stars, and foreign investors. The new gentry derives its income from other sources and farming becomes a commercial operation. Between 1952 and 2012 there is a revival in rural land prices which increase by a staggering 10,745%.

There may be discrepancies in this account and, no doubt, many gaps. The landed nobility and gentry were never of one mind and many engaged in commerce, mining, industry, and urban property dealings as well as the slave and sugar trade. Even if it could be improved upon, my purpose is to outline a credible account of some aspects of the societal provenance of the great house and, by extension, for the contents of their muniments rooms.

The Danny Estate

The estate was conferred by a great lord on one of his retainers in the fourteenth century. Between 1473 and 1956 it passed through the hands of four families :

- 1343 : Granted to Sir Simon de Pierpoint by John de Warenne, 4th Earl of Surrey
- 1473-1593 : Dacre
- 1593-1650 : Goring
- 1650-1725 : Courthope
- 1725-1956 : Campion
- Now a retirement home



Danny House and grounds, from a 1666 map



Wall Plaque, 1918 Armistice

As a seat of the landed gentry, Danny's history is an exemplar of the societal provenance statement set out above. In 1918, Danny had its place in national history when Lloyd George was holidaying there and it became the site at which the British Cabinet agreed peace terms with Germany.

The Danny Archives

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Estate Papers	1
Surrey	1
London	1
Estate Accounts	1
Surrey	1
York and Essex	1
London	1

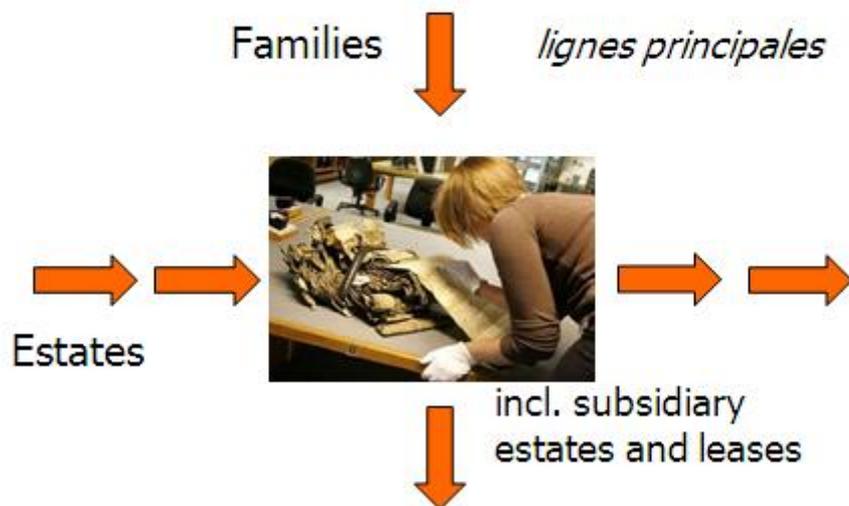
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The contents pages of the *Danny Archives* show how the material has been arranged and described in two principal categories : "Family Archives" and "Estate Archives". The distinction is somewhat arbitrary – e.g. "personal accounts" is in one and "estate accounts" in the other; "settlements" and

“inventories” in one and “correspondence” in another. That these distinctions are classificatory rather than descriptive of an observed original placement is demonstrated by the placement of most of these same sub-categories without division in the section headed “Papers of Related Families”. My point is that the provenance reflected in these divisions is a case of simultaneous multiple provenance : records that are, for the most part, generated by the families in relation to the operation of the estate. In this finding aid, two simultaneous provenance narratives are combined to describe one body of records. The only curiosity, for an Australian observer, is the perceived need to assign records to one or another of two categories instead of to both.

Estate & family papers



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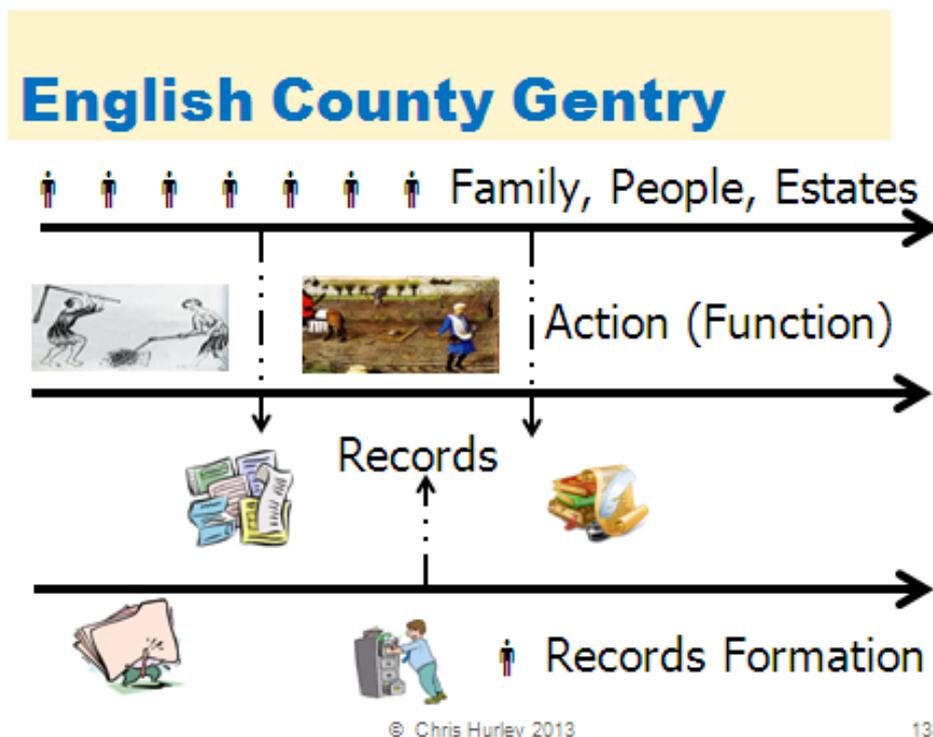
What is happening is that the papers found at Danny are at the conjunction of two creative narratives – families and estates. Instead of taking each document or series and saying this belongs to the family narrative and that belongs to the estate narrative, a better approach is to acknowledge both as equally important contextualising narratives operating, with a few exceptions, simultaneously over almost all of them. Instead of making a decision about which is the correct narrative, we can acknowledge that the records were part of each. Nothing is hidden from the user. Records identified as “family” are still so identified and vice versa. The provenance statement is being enriched by acknowledging that more than one creative process is involved.

It is not a sufficient response to say “Tut! Tut! This is not orthodox behaviour because this is not how <<creation>> has traditionally been defined”. Maybe the way creation has been defined is wrong. Maybe our understanding of it was limited by the circumstances of the time it was defined. Maybe we now need to take account of what happens in recordkeeping when new technologies are used and of the disintegrating barrier between making and keeping. Defenders of orthodox practice must be put on their mettle and asked to explain why “settlement”, “testamentary”, and “trusteeship” records documenting dealings with the estates, for example, should be viewed as family papers only and not also as papers of the estate and why “correspondence” and “estate papers” involving the families should not be classified by reference to the families who owned the estates concerned. But the requirements of simultaneous multiple provenance do not end there

Land ownership became very complicated. A family acquired many estates as it rose in wealth and status and disposed of them as it declined or became extinct. The same family owned or leased several estates at once in many parts of the country. This finding aid shows estate records in no fewer than seven counties as well as property in London. The properties may be estates or houses

leased to others, leased from others, or owned and managed for the family by agents while the family resided at Danny. Records once associated with this *fonds* may have been divested when properties were sold or passed out of the family's hands through inheritance or as dowries. The "Papers of Related Families" probably reflect the reverse process where papers came with daughters-in-law as part of a marriage settlement or perhaps as part of this same process of purchase and inheritance. In each case, records have ended up at Danny belonging to other narratives involving other estates and other families but portions of the records generated by those other narratives may also be found elsewhere. Just as the Danny papers contain fragments of other dispersed *fonds*, it is likely that (as a result of sale, dower settlements, or inheritance) papers once part of the Danny *fonds* will now be found elsewhere.

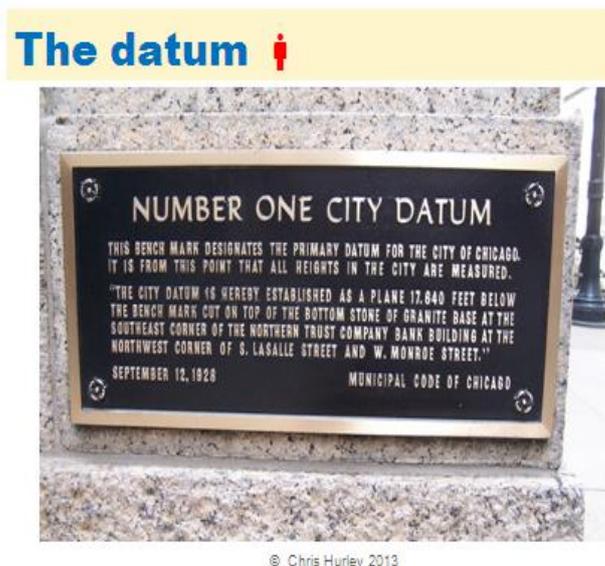
Descriptively, all of this complication can be unravelled and dealt with by employing multiple and simultaneous multiple provenance. But what of narratives that cannot be fitted into the same frame as estates and the families that owned them? What about connections arising from aspects of societal provenance such as the one outlined above for the history of the great house? That too can be resolved into descriptive entities that can be shown as having been involved in the generation of the records under review – not in terms of personal or corporate entities that are commonly shown as "creators" perhaps but certainly as categories of activity (functions) which are increasingly being recognised as a legitimate way of attributing provenance.



Entities other than those actually responsible for records formation are involved (the family as well as the agent or secretary employed to manage the business). It is not (paradoxically) the actual agents of formation that are usually shown as creators in orthodox descriptions but the family, personal, or corporate entities who employ them and for whom the actual agents of formation are presumed to be surrogates. But, in analysing computerised systems, the agents of formation and permitted use will be as significant. Organisational arrangements involving personal and corporate entities (as technology undermines traditional organisational structures, both internal and external) will not be enough either. As organisational structures dissolve, functional and societal provenance may be needed to craft a network of relationships between descriptive entities based on roles and activity rather than identity. This will take us into the world of parallel provenance.

What, then, distinguishes simultaneous multiple provenance from parallel provenance? To make a point, I will risk departing from the norms of polite professional discourse and say : “It’s the Ambience, stupid!” The English County Gentry provide a frame or ambience for the narratives of the families and the estates they owned and operated. The phenomenon of the English Stately Home can be analysed to provide descriptive entities that can be portrayed as integrating or creating other entities (including records) in the sense that the estates, while not identical, displayed common features resulting from common causes that made them the “same” in their essentials. Even though this is not formulated in descriptive practices found in publications like the *Danny Archives*, it is embedded in the descriptive narrative and the shared understanding of the archivists and those for whom they wrote. Practitioners of the Australian (“Series”) System would prefer to document that understanding in the form of descriptive entities but, even as sub-text, it is easily understood – perhaps less easily as time passes but that is another issue. When documenting functions as separate entities, it was found that the data was already there in descriptions, it was just a matter of reformatting it as separate entities. The same will be found with much (but not all) that will be documented as societal provenance. The argument that archivists just don’t do this sort of thing is refuted by the fact that very often they do - only it is hidden in so-called “objective” descriptions.

The argument for writing it down as part of the contextual documentation is one for another day. My point here is that, as we widen the scope of our understanding of provenance, the encircling ambience becomes more complex and contested. As descriptive archivists, we try to get it correct but a greater obligation (in my view) to wring out ambiguity and confusion as to what we are saying. The shared ambience of estates and the landed gentry could be something that the user of the description brings with him (or her). An argument could be made that there is no need to write it down. I would dispute that but the argument is tenable. What is not tenable, in my view, is that similar shared assumptions between the archivist and the user can be assumed when dealing with functions and societal provenance³. This is not about descriptions being correct or “objective”. It is about sharing with those who use them a stipulated, common understanding of the framework in which the description is offered and within which users can strive to understand what we mean. Our description may be correct, incorrect, biased, slanted, or devious – our assumptions must be made plain.

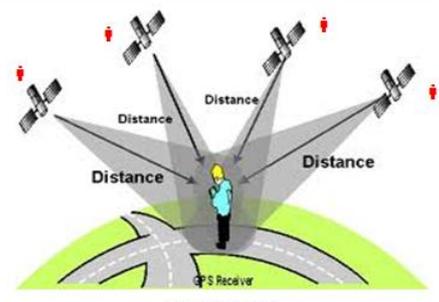


What is missing is the Datum. A Datum is a point of reference, from outside the description, which enables it to be located within a framework (ambience) that tells the user about the describer’s

³ An argument that traditionalists, no doubt, would use to condemn the idea and the practice of multiple provenance in any form.

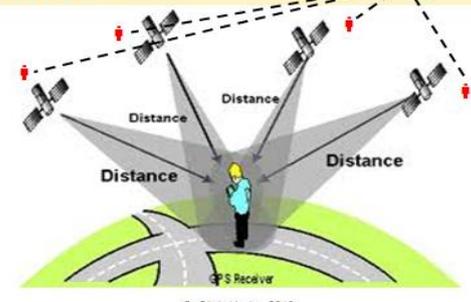
point view and allows the described entity to be positioned in relation to other entities. With a single, mutually understood Datum or point of view from which the descriptive archivist (the little guy in red in these diagrams) works, it is possible to provide alternative provenance narratives that are simultaneous (having a common ambient view) but without such a referenced point of view the alternative narratives are parallel (having no common ambience). This is why I have said that parallel provenance is more of a problem than a solution. It can be “solved” by extending our descriptions of ambience to provide a common framework within which descriptions are positioned, thus reducing a case of parallel provenance to one of simultaneous multiple provenance.

Parallel provenance



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Simultaneous multiple provenance



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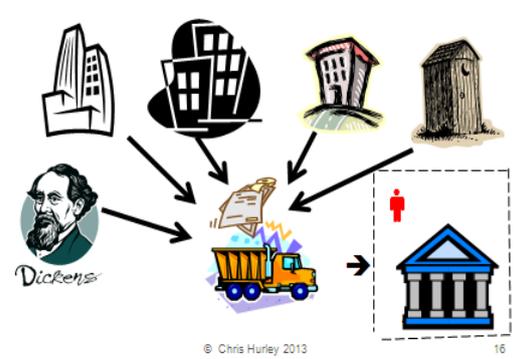
Traditional descriptive practice sees the archivist standing outside the process and portraying what is beheld, much as a painter depicts an object on canvass (the Michaelangelo Paradigm). Description takes place outside the process being described.

And description is...



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The custodial view



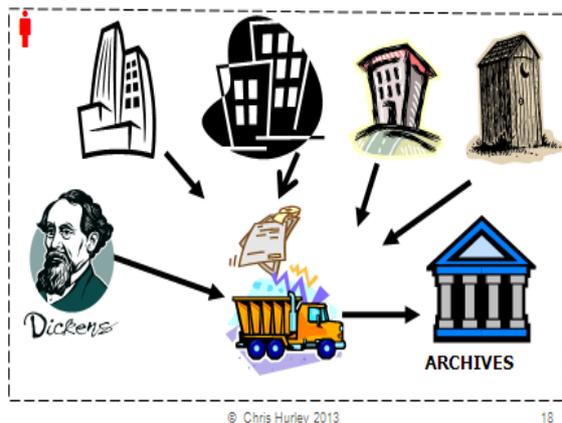
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The archivist (the little guy in red) stands outside the process and inside a boundary defined by archival custody arrangements. Records are transported into that space and are there described. Such descriptions are not ignorant of the processes whereby the records are created and used but they are documented from the point of view of the custodial arrangements into which the records have passed (into which they are gathered as into a mortuary).

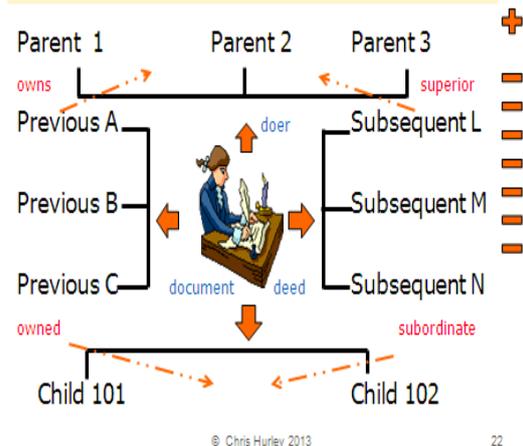
The alternative approach owes much to Ian Maclean whose descriptive ambition was to broaden the boundary (the archival point of view) to encompass the entire recordkeeping process so that records could be described in the same way irrespective of custody arrangements. This thought became a fundamental plank in the Australian (“Series”) System outlined by Peter Scott in the *American Archivist* in 1966. By describing the elements of the process as separate entities (including Documents, Doers and ultimately Deeds as well) the system can be used to establish a network of relationships that tell the descriptive tale by documenting fully not only the informational content of records but also the circumstances surrounding activity in which the entities are involved.

This approach is particularly well-suited to dealing with electronic records. Data may be versioned but the inter-relationships with context and with other records, necessary to reconstruct the meaning of the record at the time(s) of its original creation and subsequent use, is extremely difficult to capture in the current (or archived) view of the data unless relationships are forged (descriptively) between data content, the changing context, and time-bound links with other records. This is what the Classic Scott/Maclean View achieves. But the digital world takes us beyond this view, in which the Archives is still at the end of a line of transmission through which records pass, to a more volatile one in which that the connections between records and their “creators” is no longer linear.

Classic Scott/Maclean view

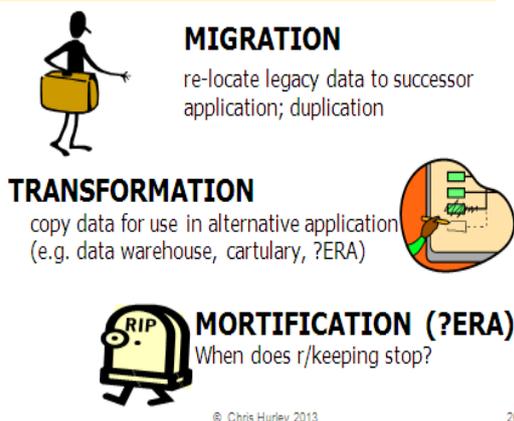


Content and circumstance

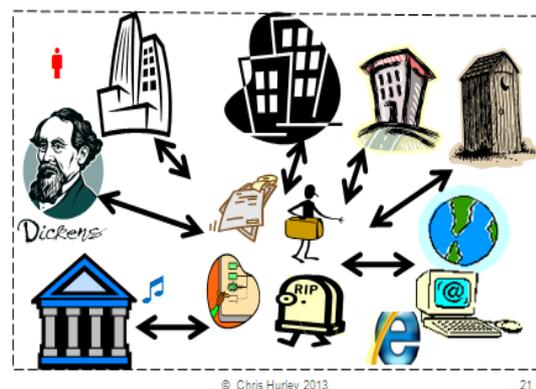


Data is subject to many new processes, three of which are illustrated below. Data sets can be re-purposed and re-used. It can be made available in a variety of ways even if it has been lodged in archival storage. Above all, it can no longer be assumed that the traffic is one way. The idea of provenance is subtly changed when data is re-purposed.

Whistling new tunes



And it now looks like this...



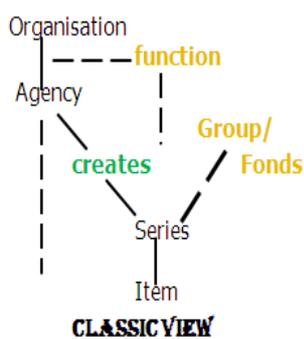
Electronic records are copied and duplicated many times as a natural part of data management. This may not involve any alteration to content but whether such a record is a duplicate or has, instead, been transformed is a quintessential recordkeeping question. Many would say that copied data is a duplicate if the content has not changed. But recordkeepers understand that a copy, even if the content is the same, may be a new record if it has been repurposed or dealt with in a different context. Although it is not necessary for the descriptive archivist to change his point of view when dealing with such phenomena (the boundary may remain the same), what is being described will be much more complex and give rise to many instances in which parallel provenance will be relevant.

In the Maclean/Scott view, entities were defined stipulatively (setting out observable characteristics of instances of the entity-type) to pin them down within the CRS System and to pay homage to traditional ways of looking at things. What we didn't get was conceptual definitions (hypothetical constructs applying a theory of description to particular cases). Ideas of corporate/personal entities (organisations, agencies, families, persons) are familiar to any archivist. What was novel was the way Maclean/Scott wanted to package them up into another way of seeing them. Series and items also were familiar concepts and at that level the approach was even more traditional. Apart from assembling series into virtual *fonds*, almost no violence was done to ways of handling them. The simple relationships specified in this classic view (creation and control) are also in line with customary approaches. But in order to fully derive the benefits that the Maclean/Scott approach can confer, it would have been necessary to accommodate changing recordkeeping practices in the digital era by conceptualising ideas about entities and relationships. Here again is a proposed re-conceptualisation of the idea we have of the "create" relationship⁴ :

create : Any other entity (like or unlike) that integrates the entity being described with other entities or which shapes, tempers or brings about a situation, action, or state of being from which it results.

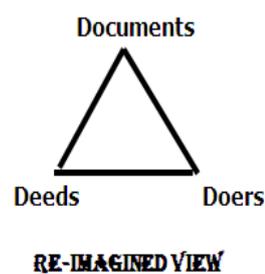
Such a definition allows us to remove from our depictions of entities assumptions about how they will behave. The recordkeeping character and behaviour of any entity will be determined not by its descriptive features but by the relationships established between that entity and other entities. We will not, to take as an example one of my pet peeves, establish an entity-type for "custodians of records" because descriptively they will be doers (identical to other similar entities that do not have custody of records). Whether or not they have custody of records will be determined by relationships established between the entity and the function of having custody of records. Being a custodian of records, in other words, is not a defining characteristic of a doer, it is a function (a deed) that any doer may (or may not) carry out and whether or not it is carried out will be reflected descriptively by means of a relationship.

New typology of description

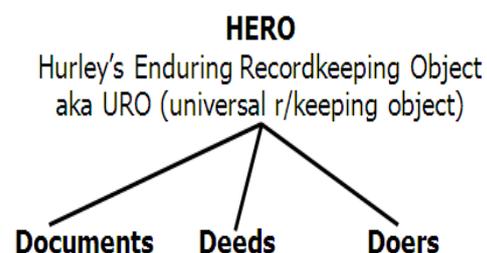


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The stipulated entities in the Scott/Maclean paradigm (two Doers and two Documents) had defined characteristics. Allowance was made for functions (Deeds) but these were not present in Scott's 1966 model. The flaws in this approach include :

- It limits the number of entities available. Instead of defining entity-types and allowing manifold instances of each type, the actual descriptive process is limited to the entities stipulated in the model. Real-world entities that one may uncover and want to describe

⁴ I don't put this forward as the last word but hardly anyone has responded to my repeated urgings to work on this so I offer it to be going on with.

(entities that may, as yet, be unimagined) have to be squeezed into the stipulated definitions or else added as super-entities requiring major reconstruction of the model - instead of simply being added as new sub-types.

- The role of the entities is incorporated into the definition of the instance instead of being left unstipulated, to be handled by forging relationships with other entities. The role is pre-defined instead of being observed and documented descriptively. A body of documents may be a Series or an Item within a Series (to say nothing of sous-series and item parts). These are features that should be handled descriptively, not by defining instances as types.
- It stultifies the implementation of the rule-base. The three entity-types (Document, Deed, and Doer) all behave according to identical rules regardless of what kind of instance of the type is involved. There may be separate sub-rules for instances of the sub-types (an Item-Document, for example, may have special sub-rules that distinguish it from a Series-Document while both conform to the rules for the Document type). The implementation can provide for sub-rules much more effectively than unnecessary duplication of the same rule for instances of the same entity-type. It's a fairly basic aspect of system design.

In the re-imagined view, Series and Items are both allowed as instances of the Document type. A lot of focus has been given to re-inventing description at the contextual levels and (in some places) the higher levels of Document description but much more needs to be done in the granular description of Documents. In simplistic terms, Peter Scott changed the *fonds* from a database table to a database report. The *fonds* ceased to be a stipulated type and became instead a report or view from the database. We must now do the same thing for the series. The series was defined in a particular way and only documents behaving in that way could be described as series. Items belonged to series and, in conformity with traditional practice, an item could belong to one series only. A new way of viewing matters is to say that whether or not a document is an item or a series depends not upon whether it conforms to some preconceived definition but on how it behaves and how it relates to other descriptive entities. Its behaviour is to be observed (descriptively) in the relationships formed between one document and another and with its context. On this view :

a series is not an object of description but the result of description

on the understanding that description is part of the process, not posterior to it. Instead of stipulating that the process consists of entities that behave in defined ways, it is necessary to enable the entity-types to encompass variant instances to be brought within a common descriptive rule-base. Series and items become simply instances of the type Document and will behave in the same ways except for rules that are particular to each as a sub-type. All instances of each of the three entity-types will have certain descriptive characteristics in common and some will have characteristics particular to a sub-type. Some characteristics will be mandatory and some will be optional. Ultimately, all entity-types are themselves sub-types of the single Universal Recordkeeping Object (URO). I have taken the view that the URO has only three mandatory characteristics (without which it cannot function as a record) : identity (because every record is unique), dates (because every record is time-bound), and relationships (because no record stands alone).

Using this typology, it is clear that we will have need of as many ideas about how to relate entities to each other as we can find. Ideas about parallel provenance should be one of them.

Note : I have incorporated many ideas and phrases from my other writings into this presentation without bothering with citations. Any casual reading of the material on my [website](#) will reveal them.