

The making and the keeping of records (1) : what are finding aids for?

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Different approaches to descriptive standardisation usually betoken alternative means for achieving a common purpose. The purpose is often said to be facilitating retrieval for research use. This view limits the scope of resulting standards and excludes those holding a wider view of the descriptive function. Agreement on the purpose of description (which is often assumed rather than debated) must logically precede attempts to achieve standardisation. This article asks what other purposes there are besides retrieval and argues that description is just as relevant to the creation and management of records.

The principle governing all operations such as making-up, handling, repairing, etc. should be that the Custodian should endeavour to add nothing to, and take nothing from, his Archives, however insignificant the addition or subtraction may seem.ⁱ

British Records Association, 1937

Is the purpose of description to provide a documentary representation or descriptive surrogate for a record or a body of records (*fonds*) which has passed out of the recordkeeping process across an "archival boundary"? Or, is it to capture such knowledge of creation, management, and use as may be needed for records to exist?

Are finding aids composed, in other words, of the data input into a finding aids system or the data output from a recordkeeping system?

Should descriptions be encoded entities standing for the object of description in order to facilitate access? Or, should they be recordkeeping tools used to establish relationships with contextual knowledge?

Usability is important and the possibility of encoding the products of a recordkeeping system to aid and assist it should not be disregarded. The link some of us now aspire to make between archival and recordkeeping systems, however, is not about tracking the location of old records of "enduring value" as they pass from one system to the other. Rather, it is about establishing the archival system as the source for metadata needed to carry out the recordkeeping task - providing the kind of contextualising knowledge archivists are used to managing. That cannot happen so long as description remains enmeshed in mere collection description. Descriptive activity should not be circumscribed by location of records nor by their appraised value.

Descriptions should be as much a part of recordkeeping as a register and movement book. In a paper registry, incoming papers are put on a file which passes from hand to hand as business processes take place. The registration (date-stamping, classification, and filing) is evidence of the processes through which the documents pass. Similarly, movements are recorded - both on the file cover and in a central movement register. The annotations and the register and index entries are metadata giving the record-objectⁱⁱ its context.

The object is a record because it has both content and context. The encapsulating metadata binds content to knowledge of circumstance. It is part of the record because without such knowledge a record cannot exist. Register and movement cards do not merely describe the files they control but, together with the files, make up the record of transactions.

Descriptions support the continued existence of records after their migration from one system into another - when records pass out of an environment where it can be assumed that users bring contextual understanding with them. Data concerning their origins and use has to be documented if they are to retain recordness after they leave the creating environment. It has hitherto been known to witnesses whose testimony could (and would) have been called upon to verify the probative value of the records should a court have felt the documents did not speak for themselves. They are kept "in use", not only by practising negative virtues (adding nothing, etc.) but also by actively intervening to preserve the knowledge of business and recordkeeping processes, without which they go out of use and cease to be records at all - merely estrays.

In a creating agency, the *fonds* is not documented because all the records in that place belong to the same *fonds*. The *fonds* re-forms inside the archives with each successive transfer. Knowledge of it, though undocumented, always existed as contextual understanding in the mind of the records creator.

If a court, having to decide whether or not to admit a document as evidence, felt that its context was not self-evident, it would hear testimony from the mouths of witnesses who had that contextual knowledge in their heads - requiring not merely the "testimony" of the document itself but also sworn evidence (knowledge) of recordkeeping activity. The connection of the record with knowledge of context is, from the outset, essential to its survival and its usefulness. Archival description is simply a postponement of what could have been documented at creation.

Description does not formulate new knowledge, it captures knowledge which was always a necessary component of the record - kept not in written but in living finding aids. If knowledge of the circumstances of creation, keeping and use is not in the record itself (inscribed or encoded onto the record), it must be documented when the record moves into an environment where it is joined with records emanating from other creating environments, different systems, and other business processes (where contextual knowledge can no longer be assumed to exist in the minds of keepers and users).

This is a recordkeeping process. In the new environment, it becomes necessary to document what has hitherto not been written down - because the records have custodians who are unfamiliar with the arrangements in which the records were generated and because it is necessary to distinguish records belonging to one process from those belonging to another.

This is a perfectly workable statement of the purpose of both recordkeeping metadata and of archival description in cyberspace. In an electronic environment (without physical boundaries) the moment at which the record has to be able to survive outside of the realm of contextual understanding of its creator can arise when the record is created. The purpose of description in cyberspace is not to describe records which pop out of a record making machine but to sustain an environment in which they can exist.

We are not just describing a record, we are keeping the record - if you like, making it. Making a record continues long after the business process which it documents has ceased - to the extent that we are setting down or encoding essential knowledge about the circumstances of its generation which will be lost if not now documented. This is analogous to giving oral testimony in court in support of a documentary exhibit and can be clearly distinguished from remaking or rewriting the record (exhibit).

Some might call this "preserving" the record and I would not quibble with that. My disagreement is with those who want to distinguish making and preserving as separate tasks. That model of archival description is one in which the record is a self-sustaining

object independent of description. I see little difference between the pen-stroke which inscribes the record, the annotation which documents its use, and the description which tells us the context in which it was created when it is necessary to do so.

If any distinction is to be made, it is that the record maker documents the business process and the archivist documents the recordkeeping process. It's all part of the recordkeeping business. Contrast this with the view that archivists make finding aids after the recordkeeping process has stopped and stand outside the process, being part of a different (preservation) processⁱⁱⁱ.

This analysis applies equally to private as well as to corporate records. When a manuscripts librarian describes a deposit by documenting knowledge about the depositor and his activities, he (the librarian) becomes a participant in the recordkeeping process (a co-creator of the *fonds*, in partnership with the depositor^{iv}) by adding to the records the hitherto undocumented metadata which cocoons the manuscripts and ensures their continuing evidential value. This "intervention" is necessary because the depositor neglected (if you like) to fully document those elements of context necessary for the records' survival for use by anyone other than himself. We are repairing that neglect. It is done now because the records have moved out of the donor's possession (where such knowledge as the finding aids contain existed in the minds of the makers and the users of the records) and into the manuscripts collection (where it does not).

It is neither here nor there whether such knowledge is inscribed onto the record or kept as a description of the record and immaterial whether the knowledge is documented at the same time the content is captured or at some other time - before or after that moment - provided, in all cases, that authenticity is guaranteed.

The need to guarantee authenticity may, of course, invalidate some attempts to capture contextual knowledge. It could be argued, for example, and without conceding the point, that the best guarantee of authenticity is to ensure that contextual metadata is captured at the moment of creation and never changed subsequently. Just as a court will sift the testimony brought to establish the probative value of a document, we cannot accept just any archival description as validating a record.

Wendy Duff and Kent Haworth have described^v a comprehensive model for archival description and Barbara Reed^{vi} has analysed the requirements for metadata in recordkeeping. Duff and Haworth posit the existence of an emerging consensus which Reed is simply not part of. We can understand this better if we "place" both articles within Frank Upward's continuum model^{vii} to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the consensus identified by Duff and Haworth and why Barbara (and I) can't share in it.

Is the difference (as Duff and Haworth imply^{viii}) simply a matter of "Australians" pursuing a different path? No. For that would suggest a commonality of purpose and a disagreement over method. This debate is not about the respective merits of different methods for achieving the same purpose. It is about how to resolve differences of purpose. It is a matter, then, of identifying these conflicting purposes.

Internationally, the last opportunity to try to resolve this was in 1993 in Stockholm when the ICA Descriptive Standards Committee decided not to discuss further problems with the draft *Statement of Principles* which originally supported *ISAD(G)*. Instead, the Committee moved straight into a consideration of the text of the standard. This has left the descriptive standards discourse rudderless (for everyone except those who didn't have problems with the *Statement of Principles*) because there is no agreed bench-mark (no statement of common purpose) against which to test *ISAD(G)* or anything else.

Proponents of the ICA standards^x hold them to be “theory neutral”. I think this claim confuses more than it helps. Whether or not a standard is theory neutral all depends on your point view. A standard might appear to you to be “theory neutral” because it supports purposes you think you have in common with everyone else. But it will appear to be full of theory to someone whose purposes aren’t the same as yours. Thus, if you are a flat-earther, you may devise a “theory neutral” approach for travelling to Cathay based on an agreed starting point : “always sail east after rounding the Cape of Good Hope”. This approach will satisfy the Dutch and Portuguese who never do anything else, but it will seem anything but “theory neutral” to Christopher Columbus (who wants to sail west) or the Wright Brothers (who don’t want to sail anywhere).

The ICA standards only appear to be “theory neutral” to those working within what they think are the agreed bounds of “archival principle” and what they suppose are commonly accepted perceptions of the “purposes of description”^x. One doesn’t even have to disagree with their principles and purposes to find their standards to be theory laden and very confining. What is sometimes (wrongly) identified as the “Australian” view does not reject those principles and purposes. It comprehends and goes beyond them. A standard based on the “Australian” view should suit very well those wedded to the ICA principles, since it would serve their purposes and more besides. On the other hand, the ICA standards do not satisfy “Australian” needs which are the same only up to a point, and comprise additional needs (other purposes) which the ICA standards do not satisfy.

The “Australian” view - which is neither universally held here nor confined only to Australia - is clearly a minority view, losing strength even in Australia. I believe that this minority view will prove to be what archivists (or those who replace us when we are shown to be unequal to the task) will need to re-engineer archival work into cyberspace and that what I fear is becoming the majority view will prove to be a dead end. If we had agreement on what the purpose of archival description is (in reality, that is, and not just in the minds of some), that question could be resolved now, intellectually, without further ado. Failing that agreement, we must await the verdict of history to find out who is right and who is wrong.

Encoding any data requires a knowledge of how the data is going to be used. If it relates to airline bookings, it helps to know how airline bookings are done and what they’re for. There is an assumption by archivists that they know how archival descriptions are done and what they’re for - either out of reverence for traditions which (it is believed) settled these questions long ago or because the consequences could otherwise be uncomfortable. For this reason, some people don’t even want to discuss what we do - just how to do it. But you can’t usefully discuss how to do anything if you don’t really understand what it is.

The pursuit of system- or theory-neutral standardisation requires a consensus of some kind about how archival descriptions are done and what they’re for. Challenging it exposes the standard to a wider context in which alternative theories are possible. An “agreed” purpose of archival description is the theory upon which (paradoxically) any theory-neutral descriptive standard must, necessarily, depend.

Here is one statement of the purpose of archival description :

to assist researchers in locating materials relevant to their research ... [and] ... to identify and request the physical entities of interest to them^{xi}

On this view, archival descriptions are for locating, identifying, and requesting “materials relevant to ... research” by “users” (generally identified as researchers frequenting archival facilities). The alternative view is that :

- (1) description is not primarily about retrieval at all, it is about making and keeping records, and
- (2) the “users” are the makers and keepers of records and anyone else who has to consult them for any purpose - not just for research and regardless of whether the consultation occurs in an archives facility.

This view deposes “research use” as the primary objective. It follows that description belongs as much outside as within the archival facility, begins when records are first made (if not before), and is shaped by needs which are far more complex and diverse than merely satisfying “research” needs (as that term is used within this debate).

When records were transferred, archivists thought they had licence to preserve and describe, but not to add or subtract. This was the principle set out in the 1931 statement from the British Records Association (negatively) forbidding addition or subtraction and (positively) requiring maintenance of the record in the form in which it is received - because otherwise it ceases to be the record that was received and becomes something else. Archives were inert objects to be catalogued like books in a library.

It would be possible to set about encoding airline data by assuming that airline bookings are sufficiently like appointment diaries for the technology which supports the one to be adapted when dealing with the other. It would be possible to set about encoding archival data by assuming that archival description is sufficiently like bibliographical activity for the technology which supports the one to be adapted when dealing with the other.

For the bibliographer an archival description is itself an object or document which can be standardised by type and format so that -

a set of rules for defining and expressing the logical structure of an archival finding aid ... allows software products to control searching, retrieval, and structured display of those finding aids. The rules themselves are applied by tags (or mark-up) embedded in the electronic finding aid.^{xii}

It is the archival finding aid which has the logical structure, not the records or the recordkeeping process. What a bibliographer seeks to encode is the product of a descriptive process. The assumption is that the process simply manufactures descriptive surrogates for records to aid retrieval.

The importance of structure in encoding archival descriptions is made by Kent Haworth :

... The difference in our point of view (US and Canada) reflects differing archival cultures. There are two archival traditions in the US: an historical manuscript tradition and a public archives tradition. There is one "tradition" in English-Canada: the total archives tradition.

The only reason I am using MARC in my archives is because I am based in a university library and have access to it. Most other archives in Canada dont have that access. Most archivists in Canada have not "graduated" from a library school with a foundation in library cataloguing. Hence we have never "taken" to MARC the way our many of our colleagues, notably manuscript curators, have in the United States.

Now that we have a data structure standard, the EAD, which is specifically designed for archival description, and accomodates one of the most essential features of archival description, the multi-level technique, which is defined in RAD, it is not surprising that many archives and archivists in Canada are assessing its usefulness in their settings and are beginning to apply it. It is interesting as well to note that where before archivists in the UK and elsewhere stayed pretty much clear of MARC-AMC, there is now extraordinary interest in the application of the EAD.

It would seem to me that many archivists in the US from the "Public Archives Tradition" would also do well to assess its benefits as a data structure standard. In the last analysis, I

think we are all coming to appreciate that there are different lenses, (MARC, EAD,) that we can use to view archival descriptions and that this will be a positive benefit for our users as much for ourselves.

I am hoping that the EAD might just be the standard that will break down divisions amongst various "archival cultural traditions", both within the US and with descriptive traditions in other countries.^{xiii}

Retrieving a descriptive surrogate of a record and retrieving the record are seen effectively as being the same thing because once the description has been retrieved, getting your hands (or eyes) on the record is purely mechanical.

This approach rightly distinguishes itself from a purely bibliographical process on the issue of how well the structure "of an archival finding aid" can be represented. From a recordkeeping point of view, however, it is the recordkeeping system which has the structure - not a description of it. Description is an adjunct to the recordkeeping system, not a different system altogether. Its purpose is to ensure records exist, not to ensure that a record which already exists is made available. Naturally, real world systems will aspire to accomplish both purposes.

No recordkeeper would deny that retrieval needs beyond those of the records creator may need to be met. Usability, which must include retrievability, is (for some) a functional requirement for recordkeeping. The same real world system can accomplish both purposes. This idea will be a problem for those who want to argue a logical separation between the roles making and keeping records, necessitating not only a conceptual separation of the functional requirements for systems of archival description and recordkeeping systems, but also a real-world separation of systems for doing both.

Such a separation seems to satisfy the needs of archivists so long as their focus of attention is confined to -

finding aids created by repositories ... [whose] ... common purpose is to provide detailed description of the content and intellectual organization of collections ... [in order to] ... provide access ... in a platform-independent electronic format ... [which will] ... assist scholars in determining whether collections contain material relevant to their research ...^{xiv}

Methodologically, this approach represents a middle path between crude word-processing and a full database application giving structure to the information and a logical search path created by imposing a ranking on the items in the documents the production of which is perceived to be the purpose of the process^{xv}.

There are now many examples available on the Internet of finding aids which follow this path^{xvi}. Instead of simply documenting location changes in a database, users of the Australian (series) system might even consider it as a possible alternative when dealing (custodially) with simple packing lists or inventories of items - provided they can put up with the tedium of revising lists each time there is a new accession.

The emphasis, however, in all bibliographical approaches, is on formulating, structuring, encoding, standardising (whatever) these surrogate descriptions of records so that they can be managed more effectively. They do not adequately document the process or system which produces collections of records or comprehend how that process differs from the one which produces collections of books because they don't need to. If all I wanted to do was deal with collected records, I too would be happy enough to use systems which were essentially designed for dealing with collections. It is because I don't want to deal with

collected records that I am uncomfortable borrowing from systems which were developed to deal with collected books^{xvii}.

Approaches to descriptive standardisation have mirrored early attempts at automation. A paper-based work process was “automated” merely by encoding the forms used to carry out that process in a paper environment. They were transformed into electronic versions of their paper counterparts and the same data was simply manipulated faster and in more imaginative ways. The work process which the paper forms represented was not re-engineered in any meaningful or useful way. Instead it was merely duplicated electronically. The possibility of achieving the desired outcome in a different manner (or achieving new outcomes) was not realised until a second or third generation of users began to understand the possibilities for re-engineering the processes themselves, not just duplicating them.

It was not to be expected that archivists would be able to reach a quick or easy agreement on issues surrounding the re-engineering of their descriptive methods. Agreement has come not by challenging time-honoured processes but by duplicating them electronically.

Recordkeeping posits a completely different idea about archival description at the very centre of the process. Finding aids are not aggregations of surrogate records (i.e. the documentary products of a system for producing descriptions of collected records). Instead, they document the business and recordkeeping processes which are being undertaken, firstly, so that records can be made and, (only) secondly, to provide pathways along which records may be found. They comprise the data input which “allows software products to control searching, retrieval, and structured display” **of the records themselves** - not “of those finding aids”. It is the records we have to manage, not the finding aids.

I once quoted the formulation given at the beginning of this article with approval^{xviii}. Since then, I have learned better to distinguish between principles and the archival methods used to carry them out.

The BRA was upholding (as I was when I quoted it) the principle of originality. Nowadays we speak of authenticity and, while I would still wish to affirm that the BRA’s formulation is a valid methodological application of a principle it was championing and I still subscribe to, I would no longer hold that the preservation of originality is necessarily the only method of ensuring it.

Preserving originality is an acceptable method for upholding authenticity, but it can be achieved in other ways. This does not invalidate methods built on preserving originality. It simply recognises that they are a means to an end rather than an end in themselves.

Something very similar has occurred in the field of law. The Australian *Evidence Act 1995* contains the following breathtaking provision :

Original document rule abolished

51. The principles and rules of the common law that relate to the means of proving the contents of documents are abolished.

Taken in conjunction with the rest of the Act, this section replaces a set of legal methods developed over many centuries for dealing with admissibility in the paper world and substitutes a revised methodology for dealing with them in the virtual world.

I incautiously said this returned us to the thirteenth century. I meant to imply that modern rules of evidence relating to admissibility of documents^{xix} represent an accumulation of decisions reached over many centuries in successive judgements in particular cases^{xx}. I

hoped to suggest that the new law was taking the sensible approach by returning us back to the time when these rules began to be formulated around the practical problems of determining the reliability of paper (or parchment) documents so that the courts could begin again to build up, case by case, new rules in a world of electronic documents where it is no longer feasible to use originality as a guarantee of authenticity. Elsewhere, the new statute makes clear (s. 48, for example) what the courts have to take into account when determining proof of content of documents.

In other words, the new law comes to terms with the modern world and recognises that methods based on examination of an original document in court are no longer adequate (though in no sense have they been invalidated). The ultimate aim has not changed, viz. to ensure that documents used in court are good evidence. What has changed is the way of ensuring it.

Archivists face similar threshold issues. Once, we placed a clear-cut boundary between record-making and record-keeping, between records and archives. Records evidenced action. Archives preserved evidence. For some, the archivist's job did not even begin until after the record creator's was over - the familiar life-cycle view. Preservation meant maintaining originality - neither adding to nor subtracting from - because change was held to obliterate the evidence.

Such ideas seem quaint now, but although the life-cycle is today repudiated we are still trapped intellectually within its paradigm.

In the European cultural tradition, recordkeeping developed to meet pragmatic not research needs :

... it would be little of an exaggeration to say that all of the successor states to the Roman empire are marked by their employment of writing in governmental and private transactions, and by their attempts, however circumscribed, to preserve the resulting records, and that for practical rather than antiquarian reasons.^{xxi}

Reliability and utility depended upon satisfying requirements which can be readily understood today :

Where there is certainly an area of significant differentiation ... is ... between those societies in which scribes were employed by the courts to draw up records of the proceedings and other related texts, copies of which might be presented to the successful party in a dispute, and those in which the recording or otherwise ... was left entirely to the latter's discretion. Although the second way of proceeding would usually involve attestation of the record ... it invariably produced a simplification in the character of the records, a decline in generic sophistication ... [and] ... Ultimately an imbalance in the availability and employment of written records affected the judicial processes themselves.^{xxii}

One way of ensuring authenticity was transmission into an archives - private (e.g. manorial), public (e.g. the *gesta municipalia*), or semi-private (e.g. monastic)^{xxiii}. So far as I know, they appear to have left few, if any, examples of what we would think of as finding aids. Procedures existed, however, to provide contextualisation needed to ensure the preservation of evidence :

Even in societies and periods in which the written record predominated it was never allowed an exclusive role. Procedures existed to subject documents to testing, not only in terms of the internal soundness of their drafting but also by requiring support from evidence produced orally by witnesses and/or by the invocation of spiritual sanctions through oath-taking and ordeals.^{xxiv}

Even when something very like a finding aid was produced - e.g. cartularies (calendars containing copies or summaries of charters) - their purpose, it has been argued, was not to preserve or retrieve the originals :

Traditionally, diplomatists have given low priority to the study of cartularies as such, using them primarily to reconstruct texts of lost originals with little regard to the nature, function, and history of this genre. Examination of their contents focuses on the identification of genuine, forged, or interpolated texts which, properly categorized by the techniques of diplomatics, can then be exploited as though they were originals. When editing cartularies, most nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors have ignored the organization of the cartularies themselves ... In other words, most scholarly attention has focused on eliminating the cartulary itself in order to provide transparent windows into the original archives of an institution. This process was considered legitimate because the cartulary was considered a self-evident attempt to preserve the contents of the institution's archives ... Because of such assumptions about the unproblematic nature of these collections, the history of cartularies and similar collections has yet to be written.^{xxv}

Evidence rests on both "internal soundness" and contextualisation. A witnessing as to context might derive from oral evidence or from knowledge of how the record had been kept. Contextual knowledge (other than that embedded in the document itself) was seldom documented. Since the purpose of archives is to preserve evidence, and therefore transitory, there was little need to write down and hold onto contextual knowledge (soon lost).

Archival description to meet the long term antiquarian interest in what happens to survive is a modern idea. Archives gather in materials from the different places in which they were kept. Antiquarian collections are unlike mediaeval *gesta municipalia* (the "place" in which documents were lodged as part of the recordkeeping process). Documents are moved, under the life-cycle model, from the "place" in which they were recorded to "another place" after they have ceased to be part of a recordkeeping process - as a method of preserving a record of events. In these "other places", finding aids ease the paths of scholars otherwise unaware of their context.

Description is the handmaiden to preservation and (while respecting this and preserving that) the archivist plays no part in records making. His job is to help keep records which somebody else made. Archivists were like photographers taking baby photos, making representations of the end product but never participating in the creative act.

This noble (if flawed) mission statement somehow became debased (in modern archives parlance) into an exhortation to assist researchers to locate materials and identify and request the physical entities which interest them.

A distinction is drawn between finding aids (guides produced by archivists) and control records (registers, indexes, and so on produced by the records-creator). Transmittal lists (used by the records creator to propel his creations across the archival boundary) seem to have been fitted, without any sense of conceptual difficulty, into the category of finding aids when it was inconvenient to redo that work ourselves.

In the dreary world of the life-cycle, records were authentic if original and produced from an unbroken chain of custody from the creator to the archivist - ensuring against falsification.

The common law never accepted such ridiculous notions - never regarded originality *per se* as a guarantee of authenticity (and, under the best evidence rule, originality is neither necessary nor sufficient for evidential value). Evidential value is not a quality (like a colour or texture) adhering to a document, an unchanging characteristic unaffected by circumstance. The law evaluates the probative virtues of a document by taking into account

circumstances - and testimony about (knowledge of) the document and its use. Evidentiary value is not an unchanging characteristic for all purposes and regardless of circumstances. A document may be good evidence of one thing (or in one circumstance) and not of (or in) another.

In a legal sense, documentary evidence was always a compound of the original document itself (internal soundness) plus knowledge about the document given in testimony by witnesses as to the making, keeping, and uses of the document (contextualisation). In the recordkeeping view, archival description (knowledge of creation, maintenance, and context) is a form of testimony going to the credit of the documents with which we deal.

Contextualisation can be assured by placement. Preservation of contextual knowledge derived from placement has been an important strand in archival thinking. In the virtual world, we are coming to question whether placement is the only or the best way.

Recent debates in the pages of this journal on the issue of archives as place (continued on the aus-archivists listserv) brushed past some questions concerning the "archival boundary". Debaters stalk round this matter like a mongoose approaching a cobra. Understandably. Mere mention of it can call forth fountains of (not always comprehensible) prose from some of the least retiring members of our profession - including me!

I think the archival boundary is principally about method, not about "place" -

... I can bring records into my repository without taking them across an archival boundary (depending on how I choose to treat them) while my neighbour (who follows a custodial path) erects such a boundary and forces records to cross it when he takes them in. It follows that it is equally possible to construct (or choose not to construct) such a boundary when deciding to "leave records with the agency".

In other words, the archival boundary is a creation of our choice of archival methods. I believe it is possible to fulfil the archival mission by using methods which do not result in the creation of such a boundary - indeed that the creation of the boundary is inimical to fulfilment of the archival mission. Others disagree.

The alternative is to believe that the boundary or threshold is essential to its fulfilment. I have always assumed that my disagreement is not with those who wish to assume physical custody, but with those who believe in the archival threshold.

That was how I expressed myself in the listserv during the debate there and these views have been quoted back to me since without the important qualification (well, I thought it was important) which I made :

At the end of the day, if you believe that the archival boundary or threshold is necessary (or that it is not co-extensive with the recordkeeping boundary - i.e. if you think that records can exist on either side of it) then you are ultimately committed (I think) to the custodial view.

I think advocates of the archival boundary attach at least two meanings to the concept and the qualification was intended to indicate disagreement with only one of them.

One meaning seems to have to do with ensuring that the evidence is maintained. The argument seems to be that this can only be ensured within the archival boundary - where a set of rules and procedures protects the record from threats to its "record-ness" (e.g. from tampering).

With this meaning (an archival boundary which establishes a set of rules and procedures within which the requirements for recordkeeping are satisfied), I have no difficulty. I would

use the term recordkeeping or evidential boundary in preference to archival boundary, but most of what is said by those who use the other term I can subscribe to and if the archival boundary is synonymous with what I call the recordkeeping boundary then I have no quarrel with anyone.

The second meaning seems to have to do with distinguishing the role of the records creator from that of the archivist or record keeper - logically, if not temporally, along the life-cycle. On this view, the boundary separates two activities and, by extension, different processes or systems. With this view, I cannot agree.

Some of the most impressive finding aids (in my view) are the scholarly products of the English County Records Offices of about forty years ago. These are substantial volumes, many of them, handsomely bound and representing a high level of scholarship. They are immensely helpful, I imagine, in "assist[ing] researchers in locating materials relevant to their research".

The data content is not very different from what one might find in any piece of archival description (though more fully and elegantly presented for the most part). It is not organised, however, in any very systematic way (consistently between one finding aid and another) into the strata or levels analysing structure in any standardised (superior/subordinate - controlled/controlling - predecessor/successor).

Each finding aid stands alone - giving a homogeneous description of the archives being described. Where it is necessary to deal with collateral records or recordkeeping processes, descriptions of (or references to) these are incorporated into the description.

There is no hint that each description operates as an entity within a larger descriptive system and that data concerning collateral records or recordkeeping processes is linked in through cross-references systematically established between the two. It is this process of structuralisation in the descriptive process, rightly emphasised in Canadian and international work on descriptive standards, that differentiates archival from bibliographical description.

These standards distinguish between data content and the way that data is organised, presented, and used (the system). The fact that system and content can be conceptually separated in this way, does not mean, however, that their interdependence can be ignored. When discussing data content, it matters very much what assumptions you make about the kind of descriptive entities it will populate and how they will be used. Data which is identical as to content but used differently are different kinds of data, not the same. Content standards, in other words, cannot be theory-neutral.

An essential difference is between **related** and **associated** data. Associated data is part of the archival description (a characteristic of the entity being described). Related data depicts a relationship between one entity being described and another. Thus the same idea - who created these records? - may be related data or associated data, depending on how it is used. In a record group, provenance is associated data because the provenance statement is incorporated into the description of the records. In a series system, provenance is related because the provenance statement simply points to a separate description of record creators indicating relationship (how related and when related).

The capacity to accurately depict business and recordkeeping processes depends on the ability to be able to document complex reality through separating ideas and carefully constructing descriptive relationships between them. Records must be placed in context - in time and place - by fashioning descriptive entities and documenting relationships.

This enables us to locate them into a time-bound, evidential cocoon of meaning. In order to understand the record and derive evidence, it must be interpreted not by reference to our observation of it in the circumstances obtaining when we access it, but by understanding the circumstances which existed at its creation and the changes since.

Observe how confusion is dispelled when associated data (Verse One) is transformed into related data (Verse Two) :

BALLAD^{xxvi} - Hilarion

Verse One
 Ida was a twelvemonth old,
 Twenty years ago!
 I was twice her age, I'm told,
 Twenty years ago!
 Husband twice as old as wife
 Argues ill for married life,
 Baleful prophecies were rife,
 Twenty years ago!

Verse Two
 Still, I was a tiny prince
 Twenty years ago.
 She has gained upon me since
 Twenty years ago.
 Though she's twenty-one, it's true,
 I am barely twenty-two ---
 False and foolish prophets you.
 Twenty years ago!

Relationships between descriptive entities must be reciprocal, however. Applying the multi-level rule^{xxvii} turns perfectly good related data back into associated data by constricting the nature of the relationships which it is possible to show between separated entities. Here is what happens (with apologies to W.S. Gilbert) :

*Though I was a tiny prince
 Twenty years ago.
 She ain't gained upon me since
 Twenty years ago.
 Now, she's twenty-one, it's true;
 But, blow me down, I'm forty-two!
 Unless you want this happening to you,
 Many to many show.*

The two fundamental issues for discussion concerning archival description are, therefore, what the descriptive entities should be and what are the relationships we need to show between them. In the second part to this article (sub-titled "The Tyranny of Listing") I will use Frank Upward's continuum matrix^{xxviii} to explore these issues.

ENNOTES

ⁱ Sir Hilary Jenkinson et al. quoted by Maurice F. Bond, "The British Record Association and the modern archive movement", in *Essays in Memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Chichester, 1962) edited for the Society of Archivists by A.E.J. Hollaender. Bond cites the source as a Statement of Principles (not available in print) which was appended to the Agenda Sheet for the 1931 B.R.A. Conference in B.R.A./A/2.

ⁱⁱ David Bearman, "Item level control and electronic recordkeeping" *Archives and Museum Informatics* (1996) Vol. 10, no. 3, pp.207-245.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Frank Upward, "In search of the continuum" in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott (eds), *The Records Continuum* (Melbourne, Ancora Press, 1994), esp. p.114.

^{iv} Opponents of this view will point out that the hand of the archivist must be visible. This is true. We will want to know the identity and role (function) of every separate actor in the record making process (including the archivist). The fact that the archivist (and his role) should be as visible as every other actor does not disenfranchise him from a role in creating the record. What uniquely distinguishes the "archivist" from all other actors in the recordkeeping drama is his special mandate to think outside the process and build that perspective into his work. In Jenkinson's terms, the archivist has a licence not to be unselfconscious.

^v Wendy M. Duff and Kent M. Haworth, "Advancing archival description : a model for rationalising North American descriptive standards" *Archives and Manuscripts* (November, 1997), Vol.25, no.2, pp.194-217.

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- ^{vi} Barbara Reed, "Metadata : core record or core business?" *Archives and Manuscripts* (November, 1997), Vol.25, No.2, pp.218-241.
- ^{vii} Frank Upward, "Structuring the records continuum, part one : post-custodial principles and properties" *Archives and Manuscripts* (November, 1996), Vol.24, No.2, pp.268-285 and "structuring the records continuum, part two : structuration theory and recordkeeping" *Archives and Manuscripts* (May, 1997), Vol.25, no.1, pp.10-35. Frank's model is associated in some minds with the "Australian" recordkeeping position. This upsets Frank (justifiably) because the purpose of his model is to stand aside from the positions it analyses, not to support or undermine any of them. The model itself does not validate or invalidate any position - it simply correlates them and evaluates their comparative strengths and weaknesses.
- ^{viii} Duff and Haworth, *op cit*, footnote 15 (p.215).
- ^{ix} To view the ICA standards go to [http://www.archives.ca/ica/cds/isad\(g\)e.html](http://www.archives.ca/ica/cds/isad(g)e.html) for *ISAD(G)* and to http://www.archives.ca/ica/cds/isaar_e.html for *ISAAR(CPF)*.
- ^x Duff and Haworth, p.205.
- ^{xi} *Archival Finding Aids* downloaded from <http://www.loc.gov/ead/eadfind.html> on 23 December, 1997, at 1138 hrs (New Zealand Summer Time).
- ^{xii} Downloaded from PRO(UK) website <http://www.open.gov.uk/pro/ead.htm> at 1205 New Zealand Summer Time on Thursday 8 January, 1998.
- ^{xiii} Kent Haworth posting to EAD@loc.gov on 13 January, 1998, at 03:34:18 am re : MARC and EAD (fwd)
- ^{xiv} Downloaded from Berkeley EAD site at <http://sunsite.Berkeley.EDU/ead/> on 9 January, 1998, at 1130am New Zealand Summer Time. I have, of course, chosen quotations about descriptive purpose from EAD sites which illustrate my argument, but compare these with the statement of "Purpose and Methods..." given by Duff and Haworth on p.204 of their article. The purpose of description is to "provide access". Authenticity is proved by documenting the "chain of custody", reflecting "arrangement", and documenting provenance and use. This last is close to a recordkeeping goal, but it is damned by mixing it up indiscriminately with archival methods. The same problem occurs in the list of ways of enabling understanding - especially in the exhortation to describe "from" the general "to" the specific (the dreaded multi-level rule).
- ^{xv} Many archivists, of course, believe that the standardised archival descriptions which have developed so far have structure and ranking. My contention is that the use of the so called multi-level rule deprives them of much of the usefulness this would have for recordkeeping - see below where I distinguish between associated and related archival data.
- ^{xvi} Go to <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu:28008/DWEB-COLLECTIONS>
- ^{xvii} Though, as I indicate above, I accept their utility for custodial programmes in dealing with inventories and the like if a full database option is unavailable.
- ^{xviii} Chris Hurley, "Personal Papers and the Treatment of Archival Principles" *Archives and Manuscripts* (Feb., 1977), Vol.6, No.8, p.364.
- ^{xix} In common law, documents are (or were) strictly inadmissible. They were excluded under the hearsay rule. The common law of evidence relating to documents is (or was) in fact a mountain of exceptions to the fundamental exclusionary rule. By 1995, these exceptions had become so numerous and the importance of documents as evidence in almost every branch of the law had become so fundamental that the exceptions were, in effect, a body of positive law regarding their admissibility.
- ^{xx} This matter came up again recently on the aus-archivists listserv. The difference between the new law on documentary evidence and other parts of the new Australian Act is significant. Elsewhere, the Act codifies and builds on existing law. In the parts dealing with documentary evidence there is a much more radical sweeping aside of the existing body of law, though as Livia Iacovino rightly points out this too builds on recent common law and other statutory developments). In this area, the new Act jumps the groove (as it were) in important ways will require a new body of case law to support it.
- ^{xxi} Wendy Davies & Paul Fouracre (eds), *The settlement of disputes in early medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1992), p.207.
- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, p.211.
- ^{xxiii} Such distinctions, of course, would be incomprehensible to the medieval mind.
- ^{xxiv} Wendy Davies & Paul Fouracre, *Op cit.*, p.213.
- ^{xxv} Patrick J Geary, *Phantoms of remembrance : memory and oblivion at the end of the first millenium* (Princeton University Press, 1994), p.83. Geary goes on to argue that cartularies (as copies) had no value or function as legal instruments, but were intended by the copyists to serve a completely different purpose unrelated to the evidential requirements of the original charters.
- ^{xxvi} W.S. Gilbert, *Princess Ida* (1884) Act I
- ^{xxvii} Chris Hurley, "Ambient functions - abandoned children to zoos" *Archivaria* (Fall, 1995) No.40, pp.22-26.
- ^{xxviii} Frank Upward, *op.cit.*