

MAD2: *Reassessing the Experience*

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Descriptive standards are being developed in a context in which assumptions about fundamental aspects of archival work are changing.¹ British archivists are not in the forefront of those promoting changed formulations of archival principles, but they are to some extent responding to the same challenges. During one of the most significant collateral meetings at the recent XIIth ICA Congress in Montréal, the session at which the Ad Hoc Commission on Archival Descriptive Standards made its report, Christopher Kitching (Chair of the Commission) made the remark that defining a fonds was more a question of asking “*When* is a fonds?” than “*What* is a fonds?” We are aware that archival entities are increasingly fluid, and that archivists need to adjust their position within the creating administration. That is about as far as the British perception goes at present.

Relatively few of the 1,300 members of the (British) Society of Archivists are likely to be exposed, at least imminently, to changes in administrative practice which have resulted in new attitudes and new formulations of principle. In central government, it now appears that the Public Record Office (PRO) has changed direction on controlling electronic records. The PRO is now not likely to follow the route mapped out by the national archives of the USA and of Canada in establishing and running electronic records departments. It has been acknowledged in London that this route is simply too expensive. A revised and reduced plan for accessioning at least some of the most important data sets is taking shape, and in the country at large these records are generally relegated to specialist data archives. Outside central government, most archivists are employed in repositories which collect or manage inactive record accumulations. Their main concerns are different from those of previous generations of archivists only in that there is increasing pressure to demonstrate effective user service. From the point of view of most of these archivists, it is more important for a descriptive standard to show that it can help to produce intelligible and usable finding aids than that it can structure new relationships between records creators and managers.

There are also changes of perception among records managers. Despite the economic recession, a number of large businesses have now taken on records management programmes based on the models produced during the 1980s. The posts created in this way absorb a distinct proportion of graduates leaving the archival training schools.

However, at the same time, records management as a discipline is rapidly disappearing into information management, and the dichotomy between archivists and records managers (always there incipiently) is daily becoming clearer. In this context, there is a need for archival standards which are capable of maintaining the potential for future change, but which are essentially conservative.

In observing that *MAD2*² is essentially conservative, a codification of past practice, critics are therefore not necessarily being so damaging as some of them intend. The compilers of *MAD2* always had this conservative perception of themselves. The changes in the terms of debate, which emerged during the Montréal conferences of 1992, have not yet had a radical effect on these self-perceptions. The *MAD2* team is pushing on with establishing its product as normative for Britain, and if possible for Europe: normative, that is to say, as a standard for the production of representations of archival materials already held in repositories.

The team has considerable grounds for optimism. The standard is used in all training courses recognized by the Society of Archivists. No serious rival has yet shown itself. In Britain (and in Europe generally) there is little penetration by library practices into archival systems. Even if there were any signs of increasing penetration, Steven Hensen's contributions to the ACA debate have revealed unexpected doubts about the future of *APPM*, in the context of radical new developments in the world of library data exchange. There is at present no prospect of *RAD* spreading into British practice, though it is a pity that this question is not being debated on its real merits. *MAD2*, on the other hand, has been adopted as a suitable basis for developing an information strategy by the (British) National Council on Archives.³ *MAD2*'s principles have been adopted by the archives of the European Community, as was declared at the unveiling of its new automated management system at Florence in May 1991. Translations of *MAD2* have been achieved or are under way in Spain and Portugal, and have been commented on in detail in Italy.⁴

The Society of Archivists has now for the first time in its history set up a Professional Methodology Panel which is devising systems for testing and developing *MAD2* as its basic descriptive standard. All recent newly designed computer systems for archival management have adopted *MAD2* as part of their structure. The oldest of these, *MODES*, is an adaptation of a system devised in the 1970s to provide cheap and easy cataloguing for museum artefacts, especially in very small museums. The similarities between these places and small, ill-staffed and under-funded archives services, of which Britain has only too many, led to collaboration between a group of archivists and the Museum Documentation Association. As a result, the *MODES* system now possesses what is virtually an agreed "archives" format which can be bought and run with little preliminary orientation or training.

During the second half of 1992, two further systems for archival management appeared. *AIM*, an application of *Advanced Revelation*, was developed at the Somerset Record Office, and a test version is now available. More significantly, probably, a commercially developed system using Informix and running on the Unix operating system has been produced in collaboration with the Portsmouth Record Office. This is named *Archway*, and is the first fully turnkey archival software package produced in the English-speaking world — east of the Atlantic. All three systems mentioned incorporate the conventions and principles of *MAD2*.

MAD2 Working Principles: Further Comments

The rule for establishing levels of description, consequent upon levels of arrangement, was formulated for the two stages of the *MAD* project independently of studies of this concept which turn out to have been going on in North America. In particular, Terry Cook's analysis of the fonds was not yet available in Britain.⁵ This made it difficult for a serious British contribution to this debate to be made at the present time. However, in the light of the discussions in Montreal, and of Hugo Stibbe's important article,⁶ it seems reasonable to restate the rule (or "administrative procedure"⁷) adopted by *MAD2*.

This rule separates the hierarchies of political or administrative dependence displayed by archive-creating bodies from the levels of arrangement perceived by archivists within the materials produced by such bodies. Any organization (private family or corporate body) which is distinct enough to have a perceived identity and a name can be the origin of an archival fonds. Dependence on a superior organization (which of course may itself be the source of a fonds) is relevant only to the provenancial or contextual information which has to be included in the descriptions (or in the authorities associated with them). A repository can therefore be expected to hold a large number of archival fonds, some of which have provenancial relationships. Some of these fonds will be large, others small. This distinction between organizational dependence and archive-producing autonomy is probably one aspect of the distinction insisted on by Stibbe: "This process produces two hierarchies: a documentary and a provenancial one."⁸

We have found that in practice, archivists tend to reproduce or create a conceptual hierarchy of organizations to bring some order into what otherwise might seem to be a jungle of unrelated fonds. Such hierarchies of what *MAD2* terms "management groups" and "management subgroups" do often replicate the political or administrative hierarchies of dependence existing among creator bodies in the outside world. It is often difficult to convince newcomers to the archival scene that these hierarchies of organizations are not the same as levels of arrangement. They rather resemble classification schemes. The example which follows (**Figure 1**) comes from the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

During the debates in Montréal it became clear that this distinction between organizational hierarchies and levels of arrangement was not yet perceived by many archivists in North America.⁹ William Maher's important new book on university archives is unfortunately confused on the matter.¹⁰ This author begins his treatment of arrangement with a classification of creating organizations, and links the fonds level with one level of administrative ranking. That this was a significant misunderstanding was underlined at the Montreal debates in several interventions by David Bearman, who was emphatic that archivists should regard levels of arrangement (and, hence, of description) as absolute, not relative.

MAD2's definitions of the absolute levels of description — fonds (level 2), series (level 3) and unit of retrieval (level 4) — have been presented for debate at international gatherings in several different countries. They were endorsed at a recent seminar held by the British Council at Liverpool University which was attended by delegates from eighteen countries, including Japan, Pakistan, Russia, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Australia, as well as from several countries with less substantial traditions of archival practice.¹¹

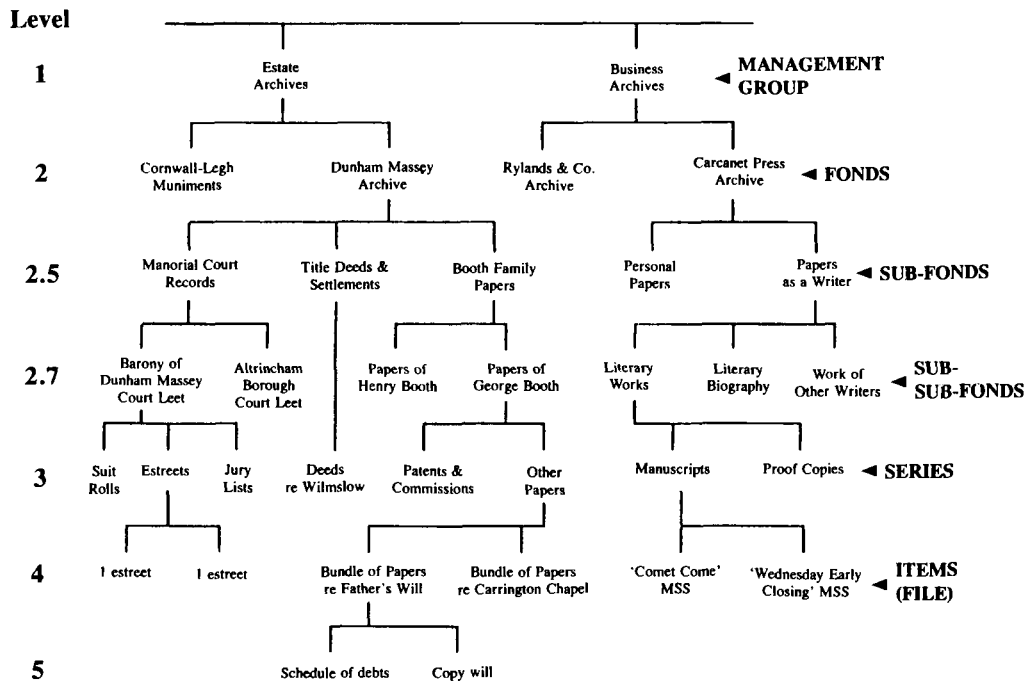


Figure 1: Levels of arrangement and description. Taken from examples in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, in particular the Dunham Massey family and estate archive and the Carcanet Press literary archive. Note that the scheme of arrangement has been considerably simplified; in practice, there would be many more branches at each level.

LEVEL

	JRL/	John Rylands University Library of Manchester		
2	EGR3/7	Papers of Mary Countess of Stamford (1704-1772)	1744-1772	FONDS
		<p>Mary Booth, only child of George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington, married Harry Grey, 4th Earl of Stamford, on 18th May 1736. In default of male issue her father bequeathed the Booth estates to trustees, George Hunt and Thomas Hunt, in trust for his daughter, with a remainder after her death to the use of her son George Harry Grey (the exception was the manor of Warrington which was devised to the Hunts in trust for sale to discharge debts and legacies; the manor was sold in 1768). While the trustees held the estates in law, Mary Countess of Stamford appears to have assumed full responsibility for the administration of the estates, dealing with such matters as the negotiations over the construction of the Bridgewater Canal (EGR3/7/2). Her husband had no legal interest in the Booth estates, and there is no documentary evidence that he had any personal involvement in their administration.</p> <p>For the probate copy of the will of Mary Countess of Stamford see EGR L/8/12/4</p> <p>3 classes.</p>		HEADNOTE 1
2.5	EGR3/7/1	<u>Financial & Estate Papers</u>	1745-1772	SUB-FONDS
		<p>The papers below reflect the active involvement of Mary Countess of Stamford in the administration of the estates. The several summaries of property leased for lives, of rental income, and of estate income in general, many drawn up in Lady Stamford's own idiosyncratic hand, indicate a wish to acquire for herself a knowledge and understanding of the estates' overall financial position, necessary for the effective management of the estates. Nor was Mary Booth unwilling to involve herself in the minutiae of estate administration: witness her own notes on the terms of a lease (EGR3/7/1/4/2), and the correspondence relating to the felling of trees on the Caverswall estate co. Staffs in which her son had an interest (EGR3/7/1/4/8 & /10).</p> <p>12 items, 119 pieces.</p>		HEADNOTE 2
3	EGR3/7/1/1	<u>Bundle of Financial Papers</u>	1757-1770	SERIES
		<p>The papers below include statements of the Earl of Warrington's and Mary Countess of Stamford's accounts with John Jackson esq, solicitor (EGR3/7/1/1/1, /3-4, /10), papers relating to Mrs Jane Gastineau (EGR3/7/1/1/2), and miscellaneous bills and receipts.</p> <p>1 bundle, 11 pieces.</p>		HEADNOTE 3
4	EGR3/7/1/1/1	Statement of Account	23 May 1757	ITEM (FILE)
		<p>Account of George [Booth, 2nd] Earl of Warrington with John Jackson esq [his solicitor]. Provides detailed information on financial transactions conducted by Jackson on the Earl's behalf, August 1756 to May 1757.</p> <p>Endorsed: "Mr Jackson's Account rec'd Fryday 27 May 1757" (in hand of George Booth).</p>		
4	EGR3/7/1/1/2	Papers relating to Jane Gastineau	Jun 1757-May 1759	
		<p>Letter from John Jackson [her solicitor] to [Mary Countess of Stamford] discussing various legal business: Mrs Gastineau's letter of attorney, charging the personal estate of Mr [Thomas] Walton with disbursements for taxes, and a draft release for John Walton; dated at Great Queen Street [London], 4 June 1757.</p>		

Figure 2: Sample archive description in paragraph mode.

The Montréal discussion of *MAD2*'s working principles began with examples of some of the finding aids being produced by British archivists. **Figure 2** shows the first page of one produced by the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

Figure 2 demonstrates several of the *MAD2* principles in operation. It shows four levels of description on the one page. This is not unusual in practice, though from the point of view of composition, it is not an entirely happy example. There are headnotes at the fonds (group), subgroup and series (class) levels. Each of these headnotes acts as a macro-description governing the set which comes beneath it. This relationship is demonstrated by the reference codes, which contain an extra element at each level, and by the narrowing of left and right margins. The user is left in no doubt as to the dependence of item on series, series on subgroup, and subgroup on group.

The first line in each level of description consists of three elements spaced across the page. These form the "identity statement" of *MAD2*, and are in effect the primary access points. (Some of the headings in the example might be criticized as having been wrongly chosen; however, individual archivists will always tend to make subjective choices). The headings are distributed into three tabulated columns: reference code, title and inclusive dates. This layout is efficient for user-scanning. The page as a whole, nevertheless, consists mostly of blocks of free text, and is in what *MAD2* terms "paragraph mode." The alternative would have been the "list mode," in which the tabulated columns contain all the text.

Figure 3 shows a possible model for a standard series (class) description:

Ref code	Title	Simple dates
	Administrative & Custodial History	
	Includes group title, background, context, provenance	
	Content & Character	
	Includes quantity/bulk and physical type	
	Administrative Control Information	
	Includes conservation information	

This model is made up by allocating text blocks to the *MAD2* areas. The assumption is that in practice archivists will write free text of unlimited length into each area, or will leave vacant any unused areas, subareas or data elements. It is of course possible to elaborate the model by providing boxes for subareas:

- Administrative history
- Source, office holders, place, previous systems
- Significant dates
- Custodial history

Sequence of ownership, places of custody
 Method of transfer
 Archivist's note
 Relational complexities, appraisal, arrangement
 Content & character area
 Abstract
 Diplomatic & physical descriptions
 Access, publication & reference area
 Administrative control information
 Accession record
 Location
 Process control
 Conservation control

The level of detail can of course be deepened by specifying individual data elements.

The Australian standard series description model, which is seriously operated as a national standard across all sorts of institutions, makes for an interesting contrast. The data elements set out in this model are as follows:¹²

Provenance [Group title] Series No.
 Series title
 Date range
 Quantity
 Physical characteristics or condition
 Content description [Includes a note on the relationship between the class and the office of origin or creator; types of information contained in the class; representative or exceptional matters mentioned.]
 Arrangement [Includes bulk and type of material.]
 Related series
 Access conditions
 Notes
 Shelf list [May include a box list with locations.]
 Responsibility note [Archivist's name; date of completion of list.]

Either model may be amended to provide for some of the information, such as administrative histories held in associated files, to be retained in separate systems. Associated files such as this can be regarded as authorities (where they are used as controls for the input of new data) or simply as part of the finding aid system.

These examples, and this discussion, concern the kind of traditional hard-copy finding aids that have always been the product of descriptive work. This was brought up during the Montréal discussions as if it were a criticism. In the view of the *MAD2* team, however, a concentration on the end-product is entirely appropriate. The purpose of descriptive rules is to structure the production of archival descriptions. Archivists should examine both the source material and the representations which are produced by the descriptive process. We are aware that by doing so we are to some extent looking backwards, and are not advancing current practice into new methodologies.

How Does MAD2 Fit with ISAD(G)

One of the most important things to happen in Montréal in 1992 was the formal presentation of the General International Standard Archival Description [ISAD(G)], together with its explanatory user guide, the *Statement of Principles Regarding Archival Description* (the "Madrid Principles").¹³ The question of how to establish a relationship between the national standard, whatever it is, and the newly developed international standard has to be faced everywhere.

The *MAD2* team feels reasonably satisfied that the present draft of the ISAD(G) represents an appropriate application of the principles included in its standard. The one important principle of the ISAD(G) which is not contained in it, that of access points, can easily be accommodated. Originally, the *MAD* researchers included access points among those concepts which they regarded as belonging to library practice, and which were not thought to make a useful contribution to archival description. Hugo Stibbe's helpful examination of associated terms such as "main entry," "added entry," etc.,¹⁴ however, both reinforces the thinking which lay behind this rejection and also points the way forward to a reconsideration. It was felt that any device which derives from the use of physical index cards (access points are headings which appear at the top of the card) would not be appropriate for archival description. This was not because card index manual systems cannot be adapted for multilevel use — we all know better than that — but that when designing a standard, one should investigate more easily manipulable formats.

In accepting the concept of access points, one is accepting the principle of authority control. From the British point of view, this would be fairly novel. In practice, some degree of authority control over indexes, for example, has been developed by (probably) a majority of archive services on an in-house basis. We are only now beginning to tackle the problems that would be involved in developing a more general system of authorities, and the question is not urgent because we do not yet have the offer of a viable data exchange system. Authorities nevertheless are clearly desirable as a general principle.

In other respects, the access point concept does not seem to offer much to archivists anxious to develop description models. Does it imply that we should opt for highly structured databases rather than for increased use of free text ones? *MAD2* itself offers no recommendation on this. As the examples of model series descriptions show, free text descriptions can be constructed quite easily by using the *MAD2* structure at area or sub-area level. Likewise, heavily structured data entries can be controlled by making the formal data elements explicit in data input forms. The ambiguity is thus quite deliberate.

An important model for a highly structured database is offered by MARC. It is probably the dominance of this format in North America which has led ultimately to the adoption of the access point idea. The absence of a suitable MARC format in Britain, conversely, has meant that there is little pressure for adopting it in common practice there. This may change. Work on designing a UKMARC-AMC format began in 1987, but was suspended for some years because the UKMARC controllers in the British Library had an inflexible approach. There has now been a change of policy and the Information Technology Group of the Society of Archivists intends to produce an AMC format for professional consideration early in 1993. If the resulting debate goes well, it is likely that *MAD2* will be amended to align it more closely with the ISAD(G).

On the principle that access points must be provided for provenancial information, as well as for content, *MAD2* is already in full agreement.

This summarizes the state of the relationship between *MAD2* and the international standard as it was at the end of the three Montréal conferences of September 1992, and before the next session of the Ad Hoc Commission in Stockholm in January 1993. Though there is no reason to suppose that any great tension will develop between ISAD(G) and any of the national standards which have appeared so far, the archival profession already has much to consider; thus the debates on description should continue.

Notes

- * Paper presented at the 1992 Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Montréal, 13 September 1992; revised and edited for publication. (This was one of the three papers presented in the session entitled "*MAD, RAD and APPM: Standard Comparisons.*" The discussion generated by presentations on each of these three approaches to a standard for archival description was of a high quality and carried forward the debate significantly, if not yet to a definitive conclusion. I am grateful to the ACA for the opportunity to offer further clarification of what *MAD2* is and tries to do, and on the relation between it and the other two standards at present involved in the debate.)
- 1 A previous commentary is in Michael Cook, "Description Standards: The Struggle Towards the Light," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 50-57.
- 2 M. Cook and M. Procter, *Manual of Archival Description*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, 1989).
- 3 *Information Technology Standards and Archival Description: Report of a working party to the National Council on Archives*, March 1991.
- 4 Roberto Cerri, *Manuale per la gestione automatizzata delle descrizioni archivistiche* (Regione Toscana, 1992).
- 5 Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description and Provenance in the Post-Custodial Era," Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: Theory, Method and Practice* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 31-85.
- 6 Hugo Stibbe, "Implementing the Concept of Fonds: Primary Access Point, Multilevel Description and Authority Control," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 109-37.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- 9 T. Abraham, "Oliver W. Holmes Revisited: Levels of Arrangement and Description in Practice," *American Archivist* 54 (Summer 1991), pp. 370-77.
- 10 W.J. Maher, *The Management of College and University Archives* (Metuchen & London, 1992). Specific references are to pp. 74-98.
- 11 *The Management of Archives and Records: New Technologies and Practices: Specialist Seminar held by the British Council at the University of Liverpool*, 13 November 1992.
- 12 P. Brunton and T. Robinson, "Arrangement and Description," A. Pederson, ed., *Keeping Archives* (Sydney, 1987), p. 149.
- 13 International Council on Archives, Ad Hoc Commission on Archival Descriptive Standards; both documents were published in the XIth ICA commemorative special issue of *Archivaria* [34 (Summer 1992)], pp. 8-32.
- 14 Stibbe, "Implementing the Concept of Fonds," pp. 110-14.