Some Things Archivists Do … Description & Arrangement

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Presentation to an ASA Workshop on Description (the Australian Way)
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Good morning.

Twenty years ago, the first draft of *ISAD(G)* was launched at ICA Montreal along with a *Statement of Principles* upon which it had been based. I was not present, but those Australians who were made a great fuss because the proposed standard would not support series-based description as widely practised here. To shut them up, it was agreed to add an Australian to the Ad Hoc Commission charged with the work. That turned out to be me.

My first task was to reassure practitioners here who did not use series-based description that it was not our purpose to mandate that approach to the exclusion of all others. Australians are realists and it was an easy task since such an objective, had it existed, would have been plainly stupid. I'm not sure I ever succeeded in convincing the internationals of that.

Two questions

⌘**WHAT** do we want to achieve with arrangement & description?
The functional requirements for A&D are a sub-set of the functional requirements for recordkeeping. These should be the same for all methods employed.

⌘**HOW** do we want to do it?
The methods employed may vary provided the functional requirements for A&D are satisfied. Queries :
1. what tolerance of variation is allowable?
2. what degree of standardisation is desirable?

Figure One

We needed to broaden the standard to accommodate both series- and fonds-based description. To do this, the *Statement of Principles* had first to be revised and enlarged to provide for a common purpose able to support both approaches. We were all trying to do the same thing, but in different ways. If our common purpose (what we wanted to do) could be identified and articulated in a revised *Statement of Principles* it would enable us to revise *ISAD(G)* in a way that would support more than one way of achieving it (how we wanted to do it)[1]. See **Figure One**.

When I got to the next meeting of the Commission in Stockholm in early 1993, however, I found that caucusing had taken place. Without further discussion, the *Statement …*was ruled out of order. It was an "historical document" of no further relevance in developing *ISAD(G)*. I have no doubt the *Statement …* remained the

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[1] The chief obstacles to this were the Multi-Level Rule and the treatment of relationships – cf. **Panel Three**. In subsequent years, slowly, incoherently, the Australian approach to relationships has been insinuated into the standards – except for *ISAD(G)*. This has made them more accommodating to series-based description (if one ignores the Multi-Level Rule) but even more conceptually confused.

conceptual framework within which the others still worked, but it could not be that for me. Any possibility of a conceptual basis for diversity, rather than uniformity, was swept off the table. Instead, the international discourse became bogged down in debate on how to describe instead of what we are trying to do.

The next two years were not fruitful so far as I was concerned. Draft after draft was produced and to each I had to raise fundamental objections. Over and over they would revise the text (often using my own words to do so) and each time I had to decline to accept the revision. All that was changing was the words; the meaning remained the same. They became frustrated and I became bored. Eventually, *ISAD(G)* 1 was released with my name on it but without my support. We also released the first draft of *ISAAR(CPF)*, a better result in some ways because it took a standard originally intended to control the value of the data content of attributes in records description a step towards entity-based description by introducing relationships there (but, in so doing, the conceptual fog became thicker).

Documenting for Dummies

Wed 22 Aug 2012 (Brisbane) - 1130

"Revising the 4 ICA descriptive standards: toward a conceptual model for archival description"

⌘Toward? **Towards!!!!!**
Duh! (yeah) Standards should emanate from a conceptual model not move towards one

⌘After 20+ years, <u>maybe</u> we need a conceptual model? You think? (strewth*)

*Australian for Give me a Break

Figure Two

The Commission was then reconstituted as an ICA Committee and I was not asked to join. My compatriot, Adrian Cunninghame, a more temperate and diplomatic sort of fellow, became a member and, whether through his influence or from an access of common sense, the international standards have become, over time, much more accommodating to series-based descriptive practice. In doing so, they have, of course, moved further and further from the original *Statement of Principles* which remains a relic, an "historical document", a fossilised statement of a conceptual purpose increasingly remote from the standards it once informed.

I have remained a constant and trenchant critic of those standards, to the surprise and disappointment of some including, I suspect, Adrian himself. Why am I not pleased that the international standards now appear to accommodate series-based description to the extent that much of what I once tried (unsuccessfully) to have incorporated in them is now common ground?

You will recall that my object was not to replace fonds-based description with series-based description or even to modify it so that both became options within a single methodology. My purpose was to identify common descriptive goals within an agreed conceptual framework to support a diversity of approaches. The ad hoc,

muddled, and painfully slow accretion of incompatible features into a single methodology with differences smoothed over by reaching for the lowest common denominator has been anything but that. It is an approach, moreover, however necessary it may have seemed politically in order to preserve unity of action, that has stultified rather than supported creative approaches to description.

A new conceptual model?

My recollection of this session (Toward a conceptual model for archival description) is that both Vitor Fonseca and Claire Sibille spoke, but I may be conflating a recollection of another session. Unfortunately, the brevity of some of the papers makes reconstruction of what was said difficult in some cases. Matters are set out more fully in two progress reports issued by ICA-CBPS : Harmonisation (4 July 2012) and Relationships (4 July 2012). In any event, I will comment here on what I can recall from the session. What Claire Sibille had to say (here or in some other session) about re-conceptualisation and harmonisation seemed to me to be mostly about the latter – aligning what is in the standards so that each looks more like the other and ironing out discrepancies and contradictions. I will say more about her suggestions concerning Relationships in **Panel Three**. What I can recall of Vitor Fonseca's presentation (the abstract is not helpful) includes a slide showing the Three-Entity Model which I understood him to say was the basis of the reconceptualization referred to. My recollection is that this was shown without citation or acknowledgement.

I am no expert on the origins of the Model and I have heard lively debate over where it came from and who thought of it first. Perhaps the ICA Committee feels it is now so common place that attribution is no longer required. My first encounter with it was in the work of David Bearman - see *Electronic Evidence* (Pittsburg, 1994), p.43. It may not look much like the Model we have come to know, but the essence was there I believe. It first appeared in the form we now know (so far as I am aware) in the SPIRT Project run out of Monash University where it appears with a sub-type of entity for Recordkeeping Business. I use the model in my own *Documenting for Dummies* but I lay no claim to intellectual ownership except for the nomenclature in that version (Documents, Deeds, and Doers).

The point is that this Model has for many years been associated with series–based description and is remote from the origins of the ICA standards. Increasingly, the development of those standards has been influenced by series-based approaches and hence they have become more reflective of ideas that the Model supports. But at some stage, if this Model is to become THE conceptual framework for the ICA standards, for the sake of clarity if for no other reason, it must be acknowledged either :
- that some kind of repudiation of the conceptual basis upon which the standards were first developed has taken place, or
- that an enlarged conceptual basis has replaced it incorporating both fonds-based and series-based approaches.

I think it fair to say that, over the last twenty years, international ideas about descriptive practice have been developing beyond what I first encountered at the Stockholm meeting of the Ad Hoc Commission. On one view, this has brought them closer to us. But we have not remained static either. Portraying it as them catching up with us is wrong. Our ideas, the understanding of what series-based description involves and its application in a technologically changing world, have also moved on. It is a dynamic field. Aligning the different approaches while simultaneously adjusting to new theoretical ideas is impeded by the lack of an agreed conceptual model.

Australian practices have been grafted onto standards that were incoherent and confused at the outset and the result, though now more accommodating to series-based description as it was understood twenty years ago, is made more incoherent than it was to start with. The goal (my goal, at any rate) was never simply to accommodate Australian thinking (old or new). It was to fit a variety of practices within a common purpose that would support diverse but also evolving practice.

A new conceptual model?
cont'd from Panel One(1)

The nub of the problem (as always) is the wretched Multi-Level Rule. That Rule, involving containment rather than entity-relationships, is hostile to series-based description and the use of the Three Entity Model. I heard Vitor Fonseca uphold the Rule in virtually the same breath as he appeared to endorse the Model. This cannot be. To have one, you have to give up the other. To have both, you have to allow disparate approaches. Until that is understood, conceptualisation along these lines will remain barren.

While it is anything but clear, if one puts together the two documents issued in July 2012, what was said at the Brisbane sessions, and the necessary conceptualisation that has had to occur in the development of AtoM, it appears that the intention now is to "harmonise" discrepancies and inconsistencies in standards issued over the last two decades without properly rationalising the different approaches that have driven their development – let alone other alternative approaches that may have been (and may yet have to be) considered.

ISAD(G) began life as a fonds-based approach hostile to series-based description. *ISAAR* was originally conceived to provide for terminological (**taxonomical**) control for the values used in *ISAD(G)* descriptions. In what I have always supposed was an endeavour to accommodate series-based description, *ISAAR* was developed to allow terms to be represented as linked entities. That approach was then carried into *ISDF*. Relationships were (properly) not introduced into *ISAD(G)* because it supported one-entity description of records linked to terminological control rather than multiple-entity description linked by relationships based on a **typology** of entity-types.

The correct conceptual basis for this dual approach was to allow for two methods :
- fonds-based description employing the Multi-Level Rule with links to taxonomies controlling data values where appropriate (but not links to other related entity-types);
- series-based description employing relationships with other entity-types (but not the Multi-Level Rule) and links to taxonomies controlling data values where appropriate.

Instead, ideas from both have been interwoven in the standards without it being altogether clear that different ways of describing records are involved. It appears that the differences are not proving to be major obstacles in implementation and that practices that are conceptually confused but workable are being developed. This is no doubt seen as a good thing and proof that better conceptualisation was never needed in the first place.

If, however (as I believe), the development of descriptive practices has much further to go and involves further significant re-imagination of descriptive methods, muddling through like this with a (still) confused conceptual framework will not be useful.

Four years ago, at the last ICA Congress, I attended a session on descriptive standards – despite medical advice that a man of my age should avoid unnecessary excitement. I came away so enraged that on the flight home I wrote *Documenting for Dummies* (**Handout One**) and put it on the [RCRG website](#) where, so far as I can tell, it has remained largely unread for the last four years, although the table now issued by ICA-CBPS in its Report on Harmonisation looks a lot like the one I did four years ago. What I put down there, as simply as I knew how, was an outline of the

conceptual model I feel should have been guiding descriptive standards. It embodies much of what is to follow here and you can use it as a take-out if you wish instead of making notes. Now it seems that the ICA Committee, having spent twenty years developing standards without one, feels the need – at last - for a conceptual model. See **Figure Two**. I have looked at the material on the ICA website and I am not hopeful. But I am prepared to be surprised. As Dr Johnson said of the dog walking on its hind legs : "It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all." See **Panel One**.

The Committee foreshadows the development of a "compendium" of the standards already developed and goes on to ask two very pertinent questions -

> "Was the compendium intended to replace the 4 ICA standards as a new standard? Or should it be only a new "render" of the standards with a few additions?"[2]

It is by no means clear how they have decided to answer them but I think it is the latter. Once again, it seems, the differences in approach will be papered over by implying that there are variants within a common approach. Instead of starting with a statement of common purpose and a recognition that we do things differently (that conflicting methods are used to achieve it), the illusion of a common method will be maintained despite the absence of a coherent statement of purpose. If descriptive practice were now settled, would never need to respond to new challenges, need not be flexible and adaptive to change, this kind of muddled approach towards compromise, while inelegant, would not do great harm. But description has a long way to go, many new challenges to face, and many adaptations yet to make. I dread its inability to do that with this as its starting point. We are now told that -

> "an implicit and informal model underlies the differentiation between the components of description, archival materials, actors (creators/holders of archives materials) and functions fulfilled by actors".[3]

Leaving aside for the moment that by limiting the possible roles of "actors" to creation and holding archives you lose much of the value and usefulness of relationships, this statement implies that the proposed work builds on an existing consensus concerning the use of relationships in description as practiced within the international community. We are also told that the capacity to represent, document and preserve relationships between archival entities is "[i]ntegral to the functionality of an archival descriptive system"[4]. But in the same paragraph, we learn that

> "Whereas ISAD(G) had received wide spread acceptance internationally since its publication in 1994, the three others are much less used."[5]

ISAD(G) is the one standard from which relationships have remained absent despite the opportunity to rectify this when it was put into a second edition. Now it will share a "common" statement on relationships to be introduced into all four standards. How can it plausibly be said, as a statement of fact, that relationships **are** "integral" to description as it is being practiced under these standards and in conformity with an "implicit and informal model" when *ISAD(G)*, the one standard without relationships, has received "wide acceptance" but the others have not? This makes no sense.

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[2] Progress report for revising and harmonising ICA descriptive standards (July 2012), p.2
[3] CBPS – Relationships in archival descriptive systems (July 2012) – announcement on ICA site.
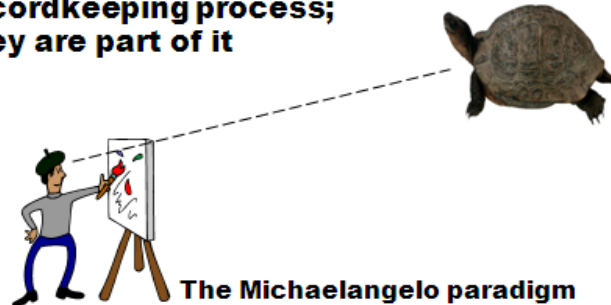[4] Relationships in archival descriptive systems (July 2012) Introduction.
[5] CBPS – Relationships in archival descriptive systems (July 2012) announcement on ICA site.

If we are to be on the same page at last, what might the conceptual model be? Could it be the Michaelangelo Paradigm? See **Figure Three**.

Figure Three

Here the recordkeeper is like an artist committing a naturalistic representation onto canvass. This painter specialises in still life and it is better if the tortoise is dead and that's how the records need to be also – mortified, laid out on a repository shelf, gathering dust. But this can't happen anymore. We must now deal with electronic records and they are lively little beggars. Moreover, as we will see later, no one is going to allow us the indulgence of twenty or so years for records to mature while we arrange and describe them before releasing them for use. This model is as dead as its object of description needs to be.

Figure Four
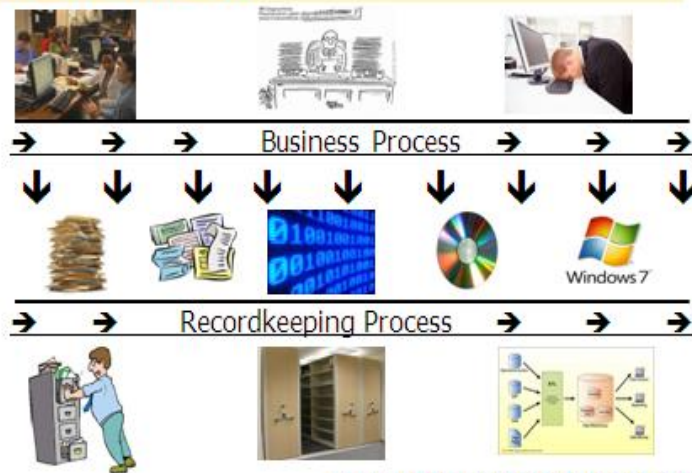
Nor can we have the Cabbage-Patch Paradigm (**Figure Four**). This is the basis upon which the EDRMS[6] was developed. In the beginning, computerised RM systems managed paper files. Born-digital content was managed by document

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[6] Electronic Document and Records Management System.

management applications. When records managers began to deal with born-digital records they adapted DM applications to recordkeeping systems. As a result, the recordkeeping functionality of EDRMS has been limited by DM's inability to manage records. But the problem goes deeper. The old RM text books all began with a chapter on filing (or indexing, or file movement, storage, appraisal, archiving …). It was all about what you did with records when you had them. The making of records was something that happened before the book was opened. Records fell out of a business process and were caught by recordkeepers and "checked in" to a recordkeeping process. They were like cargo cultists waiting for low-flying aircraft to come over and drop good things down to them. I liken this to the tale of the cabbage patch when a child asks where babies come from. They are told that mummy and daddy wish very hard and next morning they go into the garden and find a new born baby under the leaves of a cabbage. These recordkeepers know as little of the origins of records as that child learns of where babies come from.

This model will not work either. In the Bank where I work, the back office records (accounts, personnel, governance, planning, asset management, etc.) are like everyone else's and in need of this kind of intervention but the customer facing systems make superb records. You can see why. No one wants to be told by a bank that their account contains $1756.87 plus or minus 5%. The Bank must reliably keep track of dealings with the customer and of the customer's dealings with other parties, to be able to respond to complaints and queries, to satisfy regulators, and (in some cases) uphold its position in court. They don't think of it as recordkeeping; they think of it as banking. In business, this is the way of the future – business applications with recordkeeping functionality, not stand-alone recordkeeping applications. Eventually, even governments will accept this.
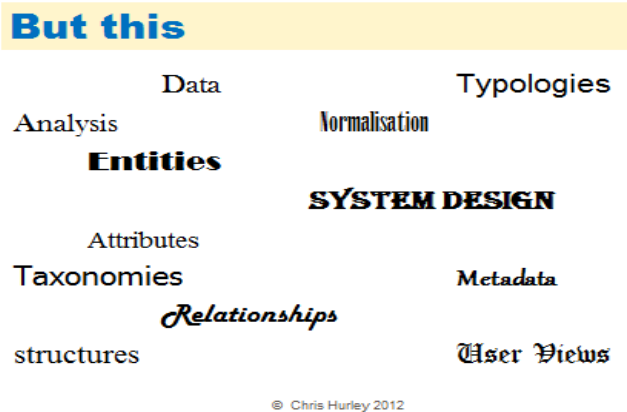

But this

Data   Typologies

Analysis Normalisation

Entities

SYSTEM DESIGN

Attributes

Taxonomies   Metadata

Relationships

structures   User Views

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Figure Five

What is needed is an integrated approach taking in all of the elements that make up recordkeeping requirements (**Figure Five**). The ones shown here are just the ones I could fit into the slide. They are not organised into a conceptual framework, partly because I don't have all the answers and partly because (even if I did) it wouldn't be helpful for me to try to supply an answer on my own. Despite the fact that I have been critical of the international standards effort for nearly twenty years now, I believe in collaboration. The answer to the question how to organise these into a coherent conceptual model must come as result of such effort. My worry is that it is not coming fast enough or effectively enough. This concern is not lessened by smug reflections one hears from time to time that widespread acceptance of the current suite of standards indicates their utility and worth.

With computerisation, our world has changed and we have yet to catch up. I have always believed that Description is fundamental to our work and to meeting the challenge of change[7]. Many years ago, we had a number of eminent visitors come to Australia, David Bearman and Terry Cook to name only two. We were struggling to see how to adapt our methods to electronic recordkeeping. We learned to be archivists as apprentices, mastering techniques handed down by our elders. But change was now too rapid; they could no longer be adapted to new challenges. Some of us found the solution in the lessons brought by our visitors. It was essentially the same as the message in Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* : if things are to stay the same, things will have to change. We had to go back and understand what we were trying to achieve and untie ideas about how to do it. We had to identify the functional requirements for recordkeeping and then figure out new ways of how to achieve it (cf. **Figure One**).

ICA 2012   **Panel Two**

A Descriptive Paradigm Shift

Richard Lehane's paper (Access to online archival catalogues via web APIs) is a fine example of the direction description must take, although I'm sure Richard would agree that we've only just begun. As indicated later in this presentation, on-line access disempowers archivists of the control they once had over the descriptive narrative. Users can take our digitised resources and the descriptions that go with them and construct far better ways of viewing and using them than we could ever think of and many more of them than we could ever undertake. We should welcome this.

Dr Tim Sharratt, who combines historical work with technical skills, an appreciation of archives, and an understanding of context, has been showing us how for years. Clever archives employ him to improve their web sites. Examples of what can be done can be found at -
▸ Invisible Australians : living under the White Australia Policy
▸ Archives Viewer [for] National Archives of Australia

He discusses his approach in an article entitled "It's all about the stuff : collections, interfaces, power, and people" in the *Journal of Digital Humanities* vol.1, no.1 (Winter 2011). In his work, the content of target resources we provide is being re-combined with new descriptive tools to create new finding aids. Resources from more than one site can be combined and inter-action with "users" to enrich the resource becomes possible.

When we place our digitised our resources on the web, and more particularly the descriptions that accompany them, archivists surrender the power to determine how they are viewed and used because of the things that Dr Tim and people like him can do without us. They still need our descriptions in the first place, and our descriptions must remain true to the purpose of archival description to preserve the integrity and authenticity of the resources, but we no longer control how our data is seen and used. It is now part of our job, as well as ensuring that resources are accurately and properly described in a technical sense according to descriptive standards, to anticipate and aid their re-use in this way.

Dr Tim is not alone. Have a look at what's going on in the Digital Humanities Networks.

Our world has now been overtaken by yet another wave of change – digitisation. For the most part, digital resources on the Internet look the same regardless of the source. There is no apparent difference between our materials and everyone else's. They are discovered the same way and used the same way. The reason for this, I

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[7] And I have been correspondingly surprised at how little attention is paid to description in the welter of professional events dealing with the challenges of electronic recordkeeping.

believe, is that we have allowed generic tools to usurp the proper role of Arrangement and Description. But our data is different. We deal in records and the defining difference is –

Structuration : the interrelation of parts in an organised whole (1925)
Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary

It is the inter-connectedness of our materials with other materials and with context that marks out the particular descriptive challenge that we must meet. It is that which confers on our materials the authenticity and meaning that make them valuable. The world is awash with mis-information. You have only to look up global warming or vaccination to find urban legends, misinformation, and straight out deceit a-plenty. Scientists and doctors try vainly to put out refutations but they never catch up. Look up Area 51 and alien abduction. Just the other day, I read that there has been a new Elvis sighting.

Many people say they don't care if their data is unsourced, but, apart from opinion and works of imagination, sooner or later everyone can be legitimately asked : "what is your source of that?". Our data is authenticated and has meaning because it is time-bound, because it has structure, and because it has verifiable relationships with event and circumstance. We preserve those things descriptively and we demonstrate them descriptively.
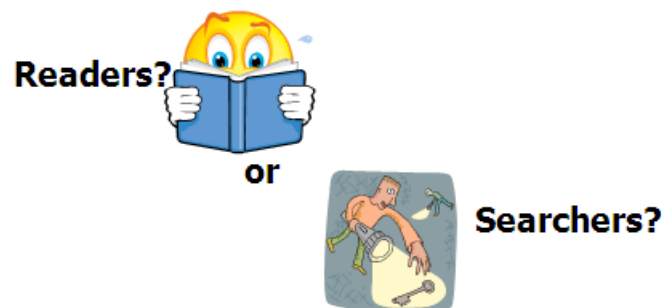
Figure Six

When I began in archives, my mentor was Peter Scott. There were two words whose use he forcefully deprecated – "collection" (archives do not collect, they hold a part of the records output of the entity they serve) and "reader" (libraries have readers and reading rooms, archives have searchers and search rooms) – see **Figure Six**. The idea was that users of a library would consult the catalogue and spend most of their time reading what they called for whereas users of the archives spent most of their time looking, combing the finding aids, consulting the original control records, often stumbling about without knowing if what they wanted even existed. Searchers would spend a whole day looking, find a promising reference, call for the item, find it was not what they needed, go on looking, call for something else, find a clue and look somewhere else, and then find what they need in the last box just at closing time and have to come back the next day. Some archivists thought this was good for them.

Alas, our users no longer want to be searchers. They want to google. We used to organise and preserve records in a form given them by the transactional processes in which they were generated and used. But electronic recordkeeping and digital access have changed that. We must now preserve and display evidence by re-assembling data into usable views and invoke description to understand what it means. We cannot go on constructing search pathways using the contextual frameworks it is our endeavour to preserve. Instead, we have to give them the records they want and then offer to contextualise them by filtering the results.

In 2011, I was invited to give a presentation in Brazil. For reasons not worth going into now I almost - but never in fact - made it. The paper I would have given is "Strength below, and grace above". In preparation for that paper, I googled three names : Simon Bolivar (in deference to my hosts); Louis Riel (to see what was happening in Canada); and Lachlan Macquarie (sometimes called the father of Australia). I describe the outcome in "Strength below …" but, to summarise, there were no archival resources coming up in the first half dozen pages of results. We are invisible out there. And that is unlikely to change.

Some results were clearly based on archival materials and there were one or two links to archival repositories with their own search engines, but that was it. If you did find your way to archivally sourced resources there was little or nothing to differentiate our product from non-archival sources. Above all, there was hardly any capacity to search archival resources globally – across the silos created by stand-alone archival web sites and search engines. There are exceptions to this –
- The British National Register (for ungathered materials);
- An Austrian Register about which I know little;
- TROVE an excellent search engine, maintained by National Library Australia which includes many archival resources but not the big ones (government archives, land registries, births, deaths, marriages, etc – which have only web site links);
- Archives Canada;
- Archives Portal Europe.

In a digital world, we are continuing to present our materials the same way we did when use was made of them on-site. We've done very little (effectively) to present our materials across institutional boundaries (instead of within them). Archives Canada is a noble (if flawed) exception. I wouldn't have gone about it the way the Canadians have but this is what they set out to do, they've stuck to it, and they've done it when almost no one else has. So, hats off to them for that.

One of the reasons our resources are invisible is that the results of a Google search differ depending on who you are and where you are. The algorithms, so I am told, that Google uses to prioritise results are highly complicated and closely guarded commercial secrets. Equally clever people spend time and money figuring out how to beat Google and push their materials to the top. We are never going to win that game. The take-out message for us is that the on-line descriptive narrative is shaped not only by signals put out from the target resource but also from signals coming from the user. Not even by shutting down the Internet could the Egyptian President regain control of the narrative during the Arab Spring. As Richard Lehane and Dr Tim Sharratt have shown us (**Panel Two**) they also have the power to take our materials and the descriptions that go with them and reshape them in new and interesting ways that we never thought of.

They can also combine our materials with materials from other sources and involve other users (related in some ways to the subjects of the records) to create whole new dimensions to the archive. We must rejoice in this and facilitate it while we also guard the integrity of the source data. You will hear a lot this week about and from Ancestry,com. Many archives have given up trying to deliver their resources on the Internet and handed over to a commercial operation. While there is something to regret in that and while we must recognise that the vast bulk of archival holdings represent complexity beyond what Ancestry commonly deals with, it must be conceded that they offer the one thing that archives programmes (with a few exceptions like Canada) have failed miserably to do. If you are looking for something, Ancestry.com finds it regardless of the boundaries that separate the source institutions. Archives should have been doing this or at least working towards it for the last twenty years. And I just love Ancestry's advertising : "You don't have to know what you're looking for." That's just about the perfect slogan if your users are searchers and not readers.

Figure Seven

Most of us offer stand-alone product which can't easily be differentiated from other digital heritage products. And what is the result? Increasingly, on-line and on-site services are being conflated. We know they can't be compared but over and over the argument is being used that hundreds of thousands of web site hits compared to a few thousand on-site visits means we must replace on site services and the descriptions that support them with on-line services. This has been used to justify nearly every amalgamation and office closure of the last few years :

- It was used to justify (in part) National Archives of Australia's closure of offices in Darwin, Adelaide, and Hobart. We know the argument is false because if it were true, they could just as well close down Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra and move everything to Walgett. And we know that's not going to happen any time soon.
- It has been used (in part) to justify a series of amalgamations with libraries :
  ‣ Canada (2004); Tasmania (2009); Northern Territory (2010);
  ‣ New Zealand (2011); Eire (2012); Netherlands (2013)

Does anyone suppose it's going to end there?

But never fear, ICA is on the case. In this very city in 2009, ICA Secretary-General (David Leitch) said :

The merger of archives into conglomerate heritage collections "must be resisted".

When I asked him whether this meant ICA opposed amalgamation in Canada, he replied to the effect that each country had to find a way that best suited its local circumstances. It reminded me of Denis Healy when he said an attack from the Opposition was like being nuzzled by a dead sheep. Digitisation has changed the discussion so far as amalgamation is concerned. Local circumstances will be everywhere the same because our product is undifferentiated. I cannot say whether the outcome would have been any different if we had approached digital description differently. I do know that the saddest words are these : "it might have been".

And so, having explored some of the consequences of poor descriptive practices, let us come now to the details of the Australian way of archival description. We have four international standards :

- **ISAD(G)** General International Standard Archival description
- **ISAAR(CPF)** International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons, Families
- **ISDF** International Standard for Describing Functions
- **ISDIAH** International Standard for Describing Institutions with Archival Holdings

There are many things to be critical about in these standards but I want to start with a fairly minor one, not because it's especially important in itself but because it well illustrates the lack of coherent conceptual modelling. When ISDIAH was released I was very critical because it is unnecessary. See **Figure Eight**.
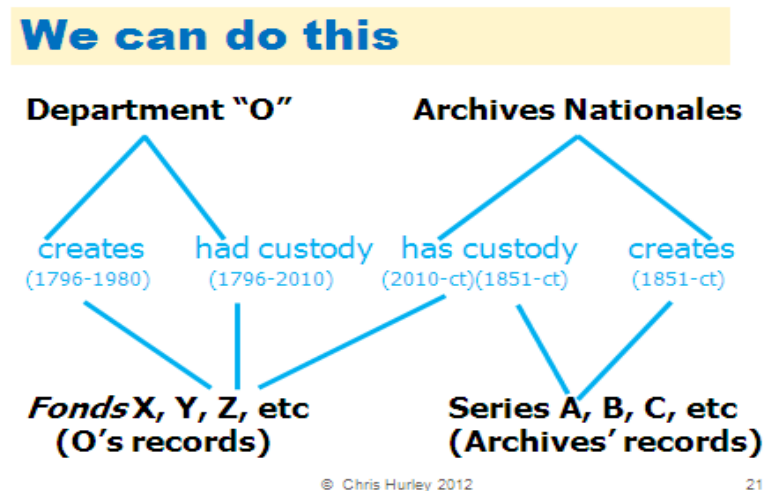

Figure Eight

Here we see two ISAAR entities, both of which create and have custody of records; in one case having custody of other peoples' records as well as their own. That is the only difference. What is an institution with archival holdings if it is not a corporate body? Perhaps a person or family holding onto family or estate papers would qualify, but they too could be dealt with by *ISAAR(CPF)*.

What you don't need is a separate standard for dealing with the custody function exercised by some ISAAR entities. That idea (custody) defines a relationship, not an entity. At a conceptual level, it needs to be understood even more cleanly than that.

Assumptions about how entities are related to each other **must not** be imported definitionally into the typology of the entity analysis but into the relationship analysis. It must apply to the description of the particular instance alone. So, we need to understand that any entity can be related to any other entity in any one of a multitude of ways – **Figure Nine**.
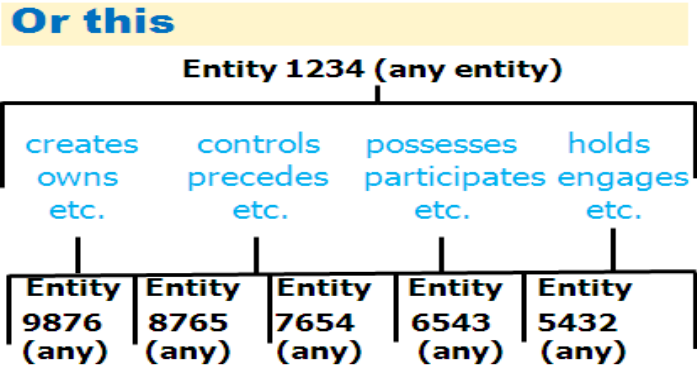
Figure Nine

When we understand and have documented many ways in which entities can be related to each other, we may wish to stipulate that some relationships are not allowed, but that is a fairly minor component of the standard supporting the particular entities involved.

A key component of the Maclean/Scott approach to description was the use of relationships to document multiple-provenance – **Figure Ten**. It began with multiple-provenance merely (allowing a series to be linked over time with successive "creators"). I put creators in inverted commas here because the word "creator" represents only one of the manifold relationships that can be multiplied between entities.
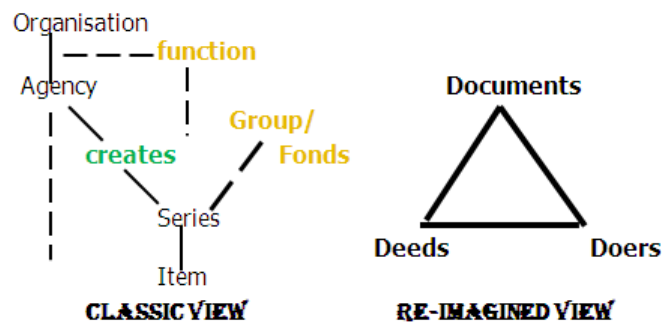

Figure Ten

Peter and I experimented with simultaneous-multiple-provenance (linked in the same way at the same time) when dealing with personal papers and parallel provenance (linked at the same time in different contexts) is a concept I have since developed.

The view represented in Peter's published writings is what I now call the Classic View (**Figure Eleven**) to distinguish it from the re-imagined view to be found in the three-

entity model. In the Classic View, the two axes (as Frank Upward calls them in the Continuum) intersect at the point of creation between the Agency and the Series. It was an important part of Peter's doctrine that Organisations could not create Series (they simply contained Agencies) and Agencies could not create Items (Items were contained within Series). One of the biggest arguments I ever had with Peter was over his refusal to allow me to assign a single Item to more than one Series. Relationships were multiplied between Organisations and Agencies but not between Items and Series.

New typology of description

Organisation
function
Agency
Documents
Group/
creates
Fonds
Series
Item
Deeds   Doers
CLASSIC VIEW   RE-IMAGINED VIEW

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Figure Eleven

The Fonds or Record Group were not objects of description; they were views generated from the descriptive data captured at Series level. Scott was aware of the power of Function but never got around to fully integrating it into his models. All this means that, in a physical world, Items stood in relation to Series in series-based description the same way that Series stood in relation to Fonds in fonds-based description. It was not a true relationship, but a link based on containment (the multi-level rule). In a re-imagined world, we must break that nexus and liberate Items from the prison of containment into the glorious descriptive uplands of multiplicity – **Figure Twelve**.

The digital series

⌘ Peter Scott changed the *fonds* from a database table to a database report

⌘ We must now do the same thing for the series   Chris Hurley 2011

Not an object of description
but the result of description

⌘ **Query :** How will a view of the *fonds* be generated when the series itself is the result of describing the data?

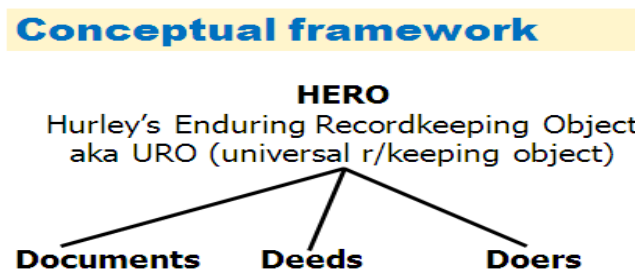© Chris Hurley 2012   27

Figure Twelve

Maclean & Scott dealt with what they saw. In their formulation, entities were defined **stipulatively** (setting out observable characteristics of instances of the entity-type) to

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pin them down within the CRS application. They didn't provide **conceptual definitions** (hypothetical constructs involving application to particular cases of a theory of description). Conceptually, the same entity-type behaves (more or less) in the same way at all "levels" - the new multi-level rule. They weren't wrong but, like Darwin trying to explain evolution before Mendel's theory of genetics (or Newton before Einstein), they didn't have all the pieces. Their formulations derive from a world of paper-based recordkeeping in a registry-based environment. We can't just go on applying those formulations, we must re-imagine them. Organisations and agencies were not conceptual, they belonged to the world they set out to describe, but they are merely instances of the "Doer" type. Series and items are not conceptual, they are Documents. Functions and activities are Deeds. If we want to leave their world and operate in the one that has taken its place, we must conceptualise where they stipulated. We don't disavow their work, we re-build it.

Conceptual framework

HERO
Hurley's Enduring Recordkeeping Object
aka URO (universal r/keeping object)

Documents   **Deeds**   **Doers**

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Figure Thirteen

A re-imagined conceptual framework may be found represented in the HERO – **Figure Thirteen**. I have also called this the URO, but that now calls to mind a dodgy foreign currency. Ironically, this takes us back to where it all began – the fonds. There is, it turns out, a single, all-encompassing entity after all : it is the fonds, just like the internationals said back in 1992. But here it is a conceptual object of description, not an actual one. How much confusion could have been avoided if that could have been agreed upon back then. The HERO has those characteristics that are common to all descriptive entities. These characteristics are inherited by sub-entities[8] and may be extended for each sub-type to add characteristics particular to it. And so on for sub-sub-types, etc.

The common characteristics should not be mistaken for mandatory elements in a metadata schema. There are only three mandatory elements in recordkeeping –
- Identity code (because every record is unique);
- Dates (because every record is time-bound);
- Relationships (because no record stands alone).

Other elements (such as name) are no doubt very useful. Most records will have them. Our standards might well say that and make name a characteristic of the HERO because nearly all information resources will have a name. But a name is not essential for a record to have. This is one of the differences between descriptive standards and metadata standards (**Panel Five**).

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[8] The characteristics are inherited, not their values.

In this typology, Document, Deed, and Doer must be understood as components (sub-entities) of the HERO. Each sub-entity is uniquely defined – **Figure Fourteen** – but it inherits attributes from the HERO and the rule that goes with each attribute is the same rule in each case. All three sub-entities have a dating rule, for example. There is, therefore, only one dating rule – not three (or four). It may be that the dating rule for Deeds is different in some respects to the dating rule for Documents, but they are variations of the same rule, not different rules.

Entity typology

⌘ **The Deed** : A documented activity or action or the invocation of an action (e.g. the process or step that is being documented in business and/or recordkeeping). ? An authorisation or power to act.

⌘ **The Document** : An object or accumulation of documentary objects containing or conveying meaning. ? The process for documenting/gathering.

⌘ **The Doer** : Corporate or natural persons (an ISAAR "authority") that undertake, authorise, or are otherwise involved in documented activity – including the roles they adopt in that regard.

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Figure Fourteen

This is how *Hurley's Common Practice Rules (HCPR)* – **Handout Two** – is compiled. In the extract, you can see that there is a single naming rule for all entity-types : "Give the entity a name" (HCPR Rule U2.002.1a). Under that rule, it is possible to express a multitude of variations and extensions for the sub-types, but the common rule remains the same. This is how to organise our thinking and normalise our data for automation of description and it looks to me as if whoever designed the AtoM software has done a bit of this already.

A variety of instances (or, in some cases, sub-sub-types) is possible - **Figure Fifteen**. I offer these only as examples. A complete typology must be arrived at collectively. In **Handout Two**, I show several pages of instances I have been able to derive from about a dozen descriptive and metadata standards I examined in compiling HCPR.

Instances of entities

⌘ **Documents** : documentary object, reference object, unit of description, *fonds*, series, file, item, record, collective, archive(s), sequence, system, consignment, box

⌘ **Deeds** : business, function, activity, role, mandate, policy, rule, requirement, relationship, transaction, expectation, code, instrument, standard, specification

⌘ **Doers** : agent, institution, corporation, organisation, agency, work group, social institution, person, actor, mechanism, position, family, authority record, custodian, involved party, external author, regulator, lender, seller, purchaser, guarantor, reference group

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Figure Fifteen

When we come to the all-important matter of relationships, however, we must not treat them as attributes of the HERO. They have a typology all of their own – **Figure Sixteen**. We are much further away from this than we are from a typology of entities.

Indeed, I have suggested (cf. "Relationships in Records") that, for many of the instances in which we deal, the statements we make about parentage are in fact just restatements of succession but more research would be required to establish whether this is universally true. Relationships will require a standard all of their own (cf. **Panel Three**). And in furtherance of that work, it will be necessary to define the types, identify the instances – **Figure Seventeen**[9] - and avoid confusing the two.

Relationship typology

⌘**Parentage**
creation, ownership, superior/subordinate

⌘**Succession**
previous/subsequent

⌘**Inter-action (how lame is this?)**
any other kind of relationship

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Figure Sixteen

The distinction between a relationship and a characteristic can be found in the notion of reciprocity – **Figure Eighteen**. Here we see John and Laura, each with characteristics that identify them as individuals. When they meet and fall in love, however, then begin living together, and eventually marry, we must describe attributes that are particular to the couple rather than the individual. Being in love, living together, and being married are descriptions of their involvement. It is not possible, for example, to say that Laura is married to John without it also being true[10] that John is married to Laura.

Relationship sub-types

⌘ **Generation (parentage)** : create, control, make, embrace, author, own, comprehend, include, contain, perform, authorise, develop, apply.

⌘ **Succession** : precede, succeed, post(pre)date, ante(post)date, supervene, displace, replace, supersede, supplant.

⌘ **Interaction** : participate, involvement, engagement, interest, commerce, dealings, intercourse, fertilisation.

⌘ **???????** : We have yet much to do in this area. Should the above categories be broken down?

Question : Does a father generate a son or does the son succeed the father?

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Figure Seventeen

But because recordkeeping relationships are not only reciprocal but also contingent and time-bound, it is necessary to understand that when a relationship ceases to be reciprocal it becomes an attribute of an entity. Thus, if John falls out of love with Laura, being "in love" is no longer a relationship. From that time forward it becomes merely an attribute of the entity, Laura. Our standards must deal with this.

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[9] As with the suggested instances of entities, these are conjectural. A proper consensus can only be achieved collaboratively.

[10] Descriptively true – bigamy is possible and would complicate matters.

Entities and relationships exist in typologies. We need to be lighter on descriptive rules but much tougher on typologies.
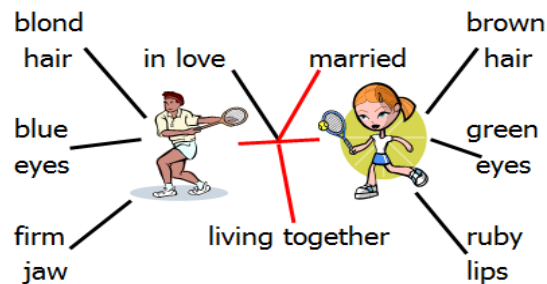
Figure Eighteen

Unlike the containment principle that underlies the Multi-Level Rule, recordkeeping entities do not relate to each other in logical ways. The essence of our descriptive work is to observe and then to record the observation descriptively.
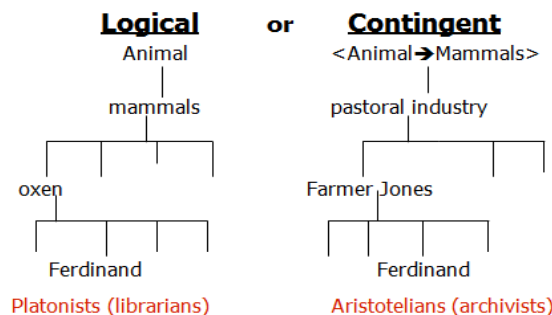
Figure Nineteen

In the example given – **Figure Nineteen** – Ferdinand the Bull is undoubtedly a mammal and membership of the genus Ox can be inferred from the definitions of Ox and Mammal, making it unnecessary to repeat those defining characteristics when describing Ferdinand (the Multi-Level Rule). But ownership by Farmer Jones cannot be so inferred; it must be observed and documented. The connection between Ferdinand and the genus Ox is timeless, it is always true. The connection between Ferdinand and Farmer Jones, however, is time-bound (as all recordkeeping relationships must be) and can be broken if Jones sells his bull to someone else.

While some of our taxonomies (the organisation of values assigned to entity attributes) may be logical, most of them will (I suspect) also be contingent.

With these tools at our disposal, it is possible to envisage how the descriptive framework can be constructed. Here – **Figure Twenty** – we can see the target resource enfolded in a network of structuration. Think of this as an interactive map from the Internet. It is possible to move forward and back, up and down. As we do so, a new target resource (Previous B, for example) moves into frame and the web of relationships re-forms around it. Archives must be understood & viewed dynamically, not as allegories frozen in time or artefacts of a bygone life-form.

Like other interactive maps, we can also move in and out – using the scaleability tool at the right to magnify the view or scrutinise it more minutely. No such tool exists and one designed to work like that is probably not what we want anyway – cf. **Panel Four**. This is a metaphor for how we conceive our descriptions to provide the underlying structure and meaning. It is not necessarily how we present it.
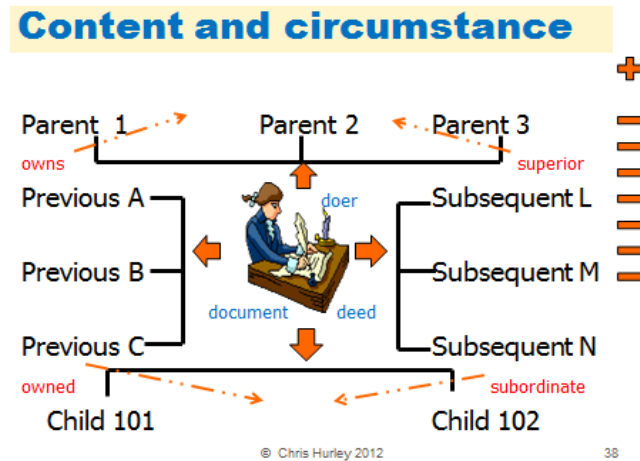

Figure Twenty

Now we come to one of the most important elements in the descriptive process – the datum – **Figure Twenty One**.
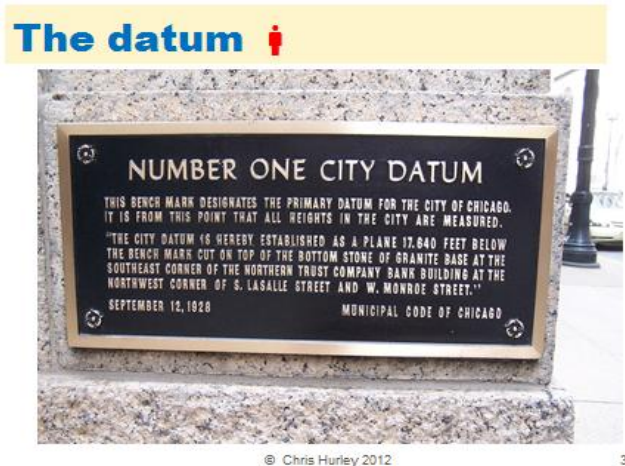

Figure Twenty One

A datum is a point of reference from which the meaning of descriptive data, the scope of the description, and the functionality needed to link with other descriptions is derived. Some of you may stop over in Sydney on your way home. If so, you will certainly find yourself at Sydney Cove (Circular Quay, where the ferries are) with the magnificent Opera House[11] to your right and the majestic Harbour Bridge to your left. If you turn around and walk south for about 300 metres you will come to a small park with a large anchor displayed in it.

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[11] There is a great story about a datum and the Opera House. When the foundation stone was laid, it was to serve as the datum for construction. After years of cost blow-outs and timetable delays, a new firm of architects came in to finish the job and went looking for it. They found it discarded in a shed because it had been getting in the way. They were aghast because the building was already half completed. The builders told them not to worry and showed them a bolt blasted into the concrete apron that they'd used as the datum to be getting on with the job while everyone else was quarrelling.

Off to one side of the park is an obelisk proclaiming that it was erected in 1816 by Lachlan Macquarie to mark the point from which all roads are measured leading to the "interior of the Colony".

Work of ICA-CBPS on Relationships

This came up, so far as I can recall, in Toward a conceptual model for archival description during Claire Sibille's presentation and refers to the discussion paper (July 2012) on the ICA web site. When I was part of the ICA Ad Hoc Commission in 1992/4, there were two major obstacles to my signing off on *ISAD(G)1* : the Multi-Level Rule and the refusal to provide for relationships. The original conception of *ISAAR(CPF)* was as an authority control for the value of terms used in an *ISAD* description (taxonomy), but I suppose I must have had some impact because *ISAAR* quickly developed functionality for treating CPFs as entities with allowance for relationships (typology). This functionality was imported into *ISDF* but never into *ISAD*, even though there was a chance to do so when *ISAD* went to a second edition.

As part of the harmonisation initiative, it is now proposed to incorporate relationships into *ISAD* also, using a text that will be identical in all 3(4) standards. Since their treatment in *ISAAR* and *ISDF*, it has been possible to link Documents with Deeds and Doers but provision for relationships between two instances of the Document type has been shaky. This may be rectified by what is proposed. I would urge them, however, to rethink this. Don't add relationships to *ISAD*, take them out of *ISAAR* and *ISDF*. Make relationships the subject of a new standard on relationships. The fact that they think it necessary to draft identical text for inclusion in 3(4) separate standards should be screaming out to them that something is terribly wrong, conceptually and structurally, with what they are doing.

Recordkeeping relationships are reciprocal (**Figure Eighteen**). They always make links with not one but with two entities or entity types. The only sensible way to handle this is to make relationships the subject of a separate set of descriptive rules. You need, in fact, two suites of standards :
- One for entity definition and description
- Another for relationship definition and description

I would also urge collapsing the 3(4) entity description standards into one, as I do in *HCPR*, but that is another matter.

When I attempted unsuccessfully to get relationships dealt with during the drafting of *ISAD(G)1*, it was apparent that there was also a need for links that were not reciprocal. This is to cater for practices that do not involve relating entities and for dealing with links that have (as yet) no documented entity with which a relationship can be forged. Both problems can be solved by treating such links as attributes of an entity rather than as a true relationship. This is how it is handled in *HCPR*. If, subsequently, the link points to an entity which has become documented, it can be converted from an attribute into a relationship. Another benefit of developing a separate standard for true relationships would be clarity around the distinction between relationships and attributed links. It is by no means clear that this distinction is going to be provided for in the work being foreshadowed by ICA-CBPS.

The discussion paper makes a valiant attempt at starting a typology of relationships, but they seem muddled about types and instances. As I state in the presentation, the work awaiting to be done on this is **huge**. I really hope they pull it off.

When I drive from my home in Gosford the road sign telling me I'm 50 kilometres from Sydney means that I'm 50 kilometres from that spot – not the outskirts of Sydney, not its population centre, not the CBD, but that exact spot. I love being one of the few people driving that road who knows that. Our descriptions have to be similarly referenced.

One of the things that distinguishes the Maclean/Scott approach to description (series-based description) is the movement of the datum from within the boundary of the Archives to that of the entire recordkeeping process[12] - **Figure Twenty Two**. In doing so, they unwittingly gave us the key to description in a digital age. They did it for other reasons and, like Columbus finding America when he went looking for China, they stumbled upon it by accident.
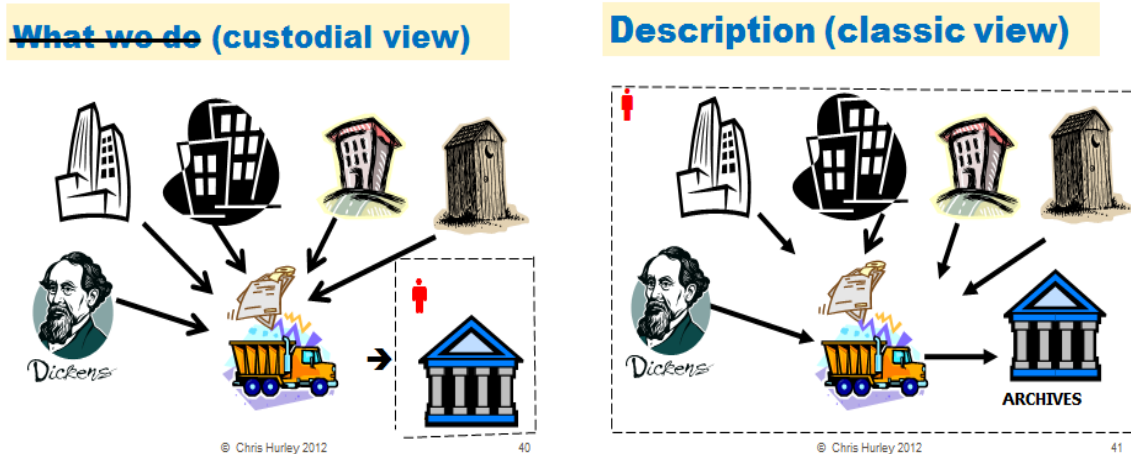

Figure Twenty Two

In the custodial view, it was necessary to make descriptions when records left their native environment aboard the little truck and reached an archives. Instead of living within the exclusive domain of the creator they now shared space with records from other domains. Important information that did not have to be documented or further contextualised in the native domain because it was in the heads of those who worked there (the "living finding aids") had now to be documented because they inhabited a shared space.
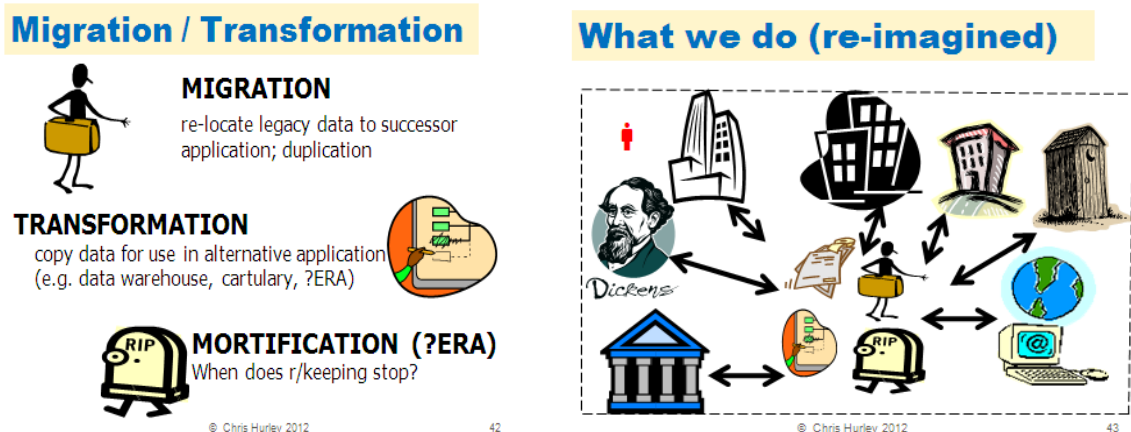

Figure Twenty Three

Under the classic view, a change in the datum had the result that shared descriptive space came to incorporate both the native environment within which the records were formed as well as the custodial environment in which they landed.

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[12] This is not to say that other approaches are ignorant of the circumstances that existed at the point of records-creation. Far from it. Traditional description was at great pains to discover and document those circumstances. This is about the point of view from which the description is made, not what it deals with.

But now the little truck must represent more complex processes than the mere relocation of physical artefacts. Electronic records undergo endless cycles of migration and transformation or else they suffer (alas) mortification – **Figure Twenty Three**. Many electronic archives (I fear) involve mortification and the best often do no better than transform rather than migrate the record. Transformation[13] is a legitimate data management process that, in our terms, creates a new record. It must now be allowed for. In this re-imagined view, the data flows are now two-way and are open to the world wide web.

Putting a New Face on It

The architecture shown in **Figure Nineteen** is the strength below our descriptive framework, but it need not be the design template for the look-and-feel of the user front end. The descriptive paradigm shift, already noted in **Panel Two**, does not involve compromising our descriptive standards, but it does involve rethinking how our descriptions are presented and used.

Another presentation at the Congress to take up this theme was that by Mitchell Whitelaw (Towards generous interfaces …).   Although I was unable to attend this session, the on-line paper makes an effective plea for archivists to reconsider how their data is presented, placing less reliance on "search".

In this new world, the role of archives is changing too – and where it is not the archives very existence is in peril. The old notion of access, something that came after transfer to archives and an interval in which the resource was arranged and described, is no longer viable. In 2011, the Australian Information Commissioner urged

- Greater "re-use" of Government data
- Improved records management in support of seamless service-delivery.

Data re-use is not a new idea. It comes in cycles and then goes away again. Maybe this time it will stick. It means that information gathered for one purpose should be made available for uses other than those for which it was gathered. This is a functional definition of archival access. The difference is that it is being done sooner and it is being done without us. The Commissioner identified eleven projects as exemplars of data re-use. Only one involved an archives – NAA's digitisation of military service records. In the United Kingdom, a Report on Reuse of Public Sector Information (PSI) made similar recommendations. The UK National Archives has been made lead agency for PSI – smart move.

Here in sunny Queensland, they have moved to a "push" model for FOI in place of the "pull" model. Archives have always operated on the push model, but this is about access on a much wider scale. As in the Commonwealth, it is recognised that records management is an essential foundation because the information must be usable but also because it must be better described. One reason FOI was originally "pull" was that there was no effective mechanism for describing Government services and information resources across the whole of government. To this day, government

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[13] I like to find past examples of new ideas and I think the mediaeval cartulary is an instance of transformation – a transcription of data from a charter or deed, often abbreviated, and sometimes inexact – not to serve (as historians and some diplomatists wrongly suppose) as an imperfect copy but with its own purpose, separate and distinct from the original.

web sites are still modelled on agency silos. FOI Statements were produced agency by agency. To support the "push" model of access, Queensland State Archives has been charged with RM responsibilities.

Being experts in RM should, therefore, stand archivists in good stead for dealing with new forms of access. In this context, RM includes (to my mind) a good dose of description. But are we experts in RM? In 2008, the Functional Requirements for Electronic Records (ICA – Req) was launched – and relaunched at the ASA Conference in Brisbane a year later. Why have we re-invented the wheel? Weren't the functional requirements done in Pittsburgh long ago?

ICA 2012   **Panel Five**

What About the Metadata?

In **Figure Twenty Four**, nothing is said about metadata. I am sometimes accused of giving too little regard to it. This is not so, but I sometimes leave it out to avoid getting into strife with the metadata maniacs. At one level, it fits into **Figure Twenty Four** as an aspect of entity management. Putting it like that, however, confirms the suspicions of those who think I don't appreciate its importance. As ably pointed out in the joint paper presented by Outi Hupaniittu, descriptive standards and metadata standards are different things. Another way of looking at it is to see metadata as a means of accomplishing what description is trying to do – an implementation strategy for the standards. Saying it is out of scope of this view of descriptive standards does not diminish its importance in description. An understanding of metadata as an enabler for description and other important processes is well set out in Jorien Wetterings' paper (Changing theory into practice : playing the Metadata Game).

The paper by Helen Morgan and Others (Standing the test of time …) explores another dimension of this issue – the persistence (or otherwise) of links to archival resources, including descriptions, on the web.

If you're going to reinvent the wheel, you need to get it right. Focussing on e/records allowed the authors to focus on data management aspects of recordkeeping. This has led them astray. All you need to say is that e/records need to be managed in accordance with appropriate data management principles. You don't need to copy them over into a recordkeeping standard. But that is what has been done. During the drafting of these things, I commented several times that the attempt to be a data management standard as well as a recordkeeping standard should be given up. This should be about the scope of our competence. Recordkeeping in a digital world relies on several competencies other than our own. Ours is in recordkeeping but we rely on others of which we are not the masters (and we must hope that they can learn to rely on us). Data management is a seductive idea because it seems so like a digital equivalent of what we used to do in the paper world. But it isn't[14]. One might just as well include system design and delivery, communications, or security. Our standards need to rely on these other competencies referentially, assuming they will be competently delivered as part of a solution in the delivery of which we also are partners. But we need to stick to what we know.

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[14] The boundaries of data management are not well settled. Here is a list of some of the things that have been identified as being included : data governance; data architecture, analysis, and design; database management; data quality; reference data (incl. taxonomies); data warehousing; business intelligence; data mining; document/records management; metadata management; contact data management; business analysis.

Of the 13-17 principles in successive drafts, only two or three were about recordkeeping; the rest were from data management. I was assured they understood, but nothing changed. It was like a bad dream – reliving the drafting of *ISAD(G)1* – each new version was different but it said the same thing.

The problem is that bringing in data management obscures the purely recordkeeping requirements. We can tell the data management community nothing about data management but we can tell them a lot about recordkeeping, and they need to hear what we have to say. But mixing up our message with ill-digested borrowings from theirs does not add to clarity or our credibility. The data management borrowings are partial – someone has cherry picked, taking some bits and leaving others out. It seems complete, but it isn't. And I'm willing to bet it is not being kept up to date to reflect developments in the data management world.

Worse is the inadequate treatment of accessibility. Accessibility was an important part of the Pittsburgh Requirements. At the relaunch in 2009 of ICA-Req in Brisbane, however, we were told that access was not extensively dealt with because it is "generic". Strewth! If you think access and accessibility can be left to the other guy, you might as well sit down, write yourself a professional suicide note, and then cut your own throat.
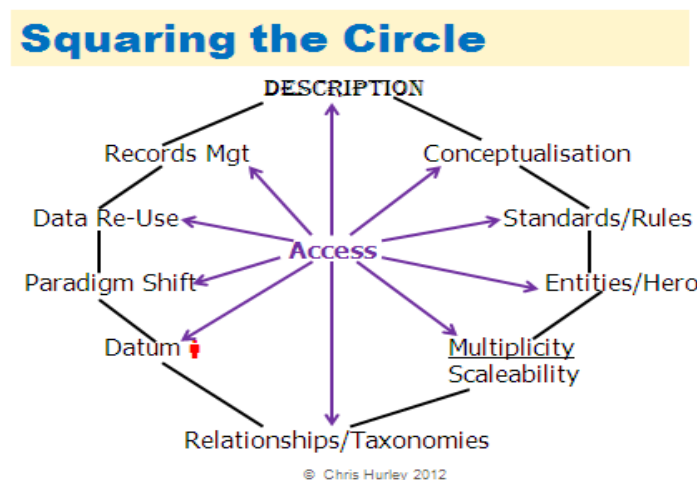

Figure Twenty Four

If you have been paying attention, the picture you should now have in your head looks something like this – **Figure Twenty Four**. Access is in the middle of this diagram but it is not central – Description is central. You could slide Access out and insert any one of the other functional requirements and the diagram would remain essentially the same. Moving clockwise, there is nothing in **Figure Twenty Four** up to and including the Datum that looks different to how it could have been portrayed conceptually at any time in the last hundred years – although we would not have depicted it this way. What is now new, what confronts us with fresh descriptive challenges, is the paradigm shift in description caused by on-line access and digitisation, the challenge of data re-use, the redefinition of access, and the associated linkage with records management in general and description in particular.

I sometimes think it is too late now to reach agreement on this way of looking at things. Even if we could agree, the time when such agreement could have helped us may have passed. Let us not despair, however. There are still things to do and examples to reassure us that they are being done. They include –

- **Gateways (Digests) :** access across institutional boundaries requiring us to contextualise more broadly.
- **Reference Sites :** provision of source or authority sites for contextual knowledge.
- **KBO :** when all else fails, keep buggering on (W S Churchill).

We are seeing more examples, now, of archivists getting on with this kind of thing. Have a look at Archives Portal Europe. Two other exciting projects were presented at Brisbane – **Panel Six**.

ICA 2012   **Panel Six**

News from Finland and France

It was immensely pleasing to find that, in the days following delivery of this presentation, during the Congress Sessions, examples were cited of both a gateway project and a reference site.

A new gateway :

The AHAA Project in Finland (Towards a new era of archival description …) is based on a new national descriptive standard, compatible with ICA Standards, but incorporating many pleasing innovations that resonate with the approach to description advocated here. It is great to hear about a project that both recognises the individuality of archival resources (the archival brand) while also aiming to improve "the availability and usability of the material Finnish memory functions (archives, libraries, museums)" and keep us connected with a wider world.

A new reference site :

From France comes word of work on a reference site in Claire Sibille's paper (Implementation of EAC-CPF…towards the development of national authority files). This is much more like the use for which ISAAR(CPF) was originally conceived - before it had entity identification and description grafted into it. Yet, like the Finnish proposal, it too envisages uses beyond the archives community as well as using description to support processes (e.g. appraisal) beyond deployment of finding aids. With the effluxion of time, the distinction between an authority record that controls the value of data in the attributes of a description of records and one that operates as a related entity has become paper thin.