

Aberystwyth University

Archives context and discovery: Hierarchy in the digital age

Higgins, Sarah; Hilton, Christopher

Publication date:
2015

Citation for published version (APA):

Higgins, S., & Hilton, C. (2015). *Archives context and discovery: Hierarchy in the digital age*. 76. Poster session presented at 3rd ICA Annual Conference - Archives: Evidence, Security & Civil Rights, Iceland.

Document License
CC BY-NC-ND

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400
email: is@aber.ac.uk

Archives context and discovery: hierarchy in the digital age

Are archival descriptive standards fit for purpose?

Sarah Higgins (sjh@aber.ac.uk) Department of Information Studies, Aberystwyth University
Christopher Hilton (c.hilton@wellcome.ac.uk) Wellcome Library, Wellcome Trust

Hypothesis: in the age of web based access, archival descriptive standards do not facilitate intellectual and physical access to archival material, while preserving context.

1990s: Standardisation

ISAD(G), with hierarchical context is developed in a paper paradigm

just as:

- Personal computers proliferated
- The Internet arrived

2000s: Cataloguing revolutionised

- Mass uptake of ISAD(G)
- Retro-conversion of existing catalogues
- Standards based software developed
- Static and searchable catalogues mounted online
- Archival networks developed (facilitated by EAD)

Since 2000s

Transformation in how information is created, discovered and used:

- The ubiquitous Internet
- Personal computers
- Hand-held devices
- Digitised / born-digital material

But archival standards (apart from minor revisions) have remained static.

Research to date concentrates on: tracking standards uptake through single implementation case studies; software compliancy developments; and comparisons between different standards.

New research will test the hypothesis given to provide an overview of current archival descriptive practice and the methods and assumptions governing this in the UK, through a 3 stage mixed methods approach:

1. Documentary analysis will assess how ISAD(G) is used by UK repositories;
2. Quantitative research will identify cataloguing progress and resource;
3. Qualitative research will establish cataloguing selection processes, the impact of digital material on ISAD(G) implementation and whether standards help or hinder discovery.

Is the information in the right place?

Inheritance from above means information is split between levels and may not be at the level needed or accessed.

Is the information there at all?

- Google wants keywords
 - Images need item level descriptions
- but*
Bulk means brevity and series level description (More Product Less Process!)

Is each level of the hierarchy independently understandable?

Information might be split across the hierarchy e.g. "Marie Stopes correspondence"

- "Marie Stopes" at fonds level
- "Correspondence" at series level
- The actual file of digitised letters called "A-F"!

- References
- Ad Hoc Commission on Descriptive Standards. (1994). ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description. Archives Task Force. (2004). *Listening to the past, Speaking to the future: Report of the Archives Task Force*. London.
- Bouché, N. (1997). Implementing EAD in the Yale University Library. *American Archivist*, 60, 408-419.
- Bunn, J. (2013). Developing descriptive standards: a renewed call to action. *Archives and Records*, 34(2), 235-247.
- Craven, J. (2004). *Linking arms*. New, Richmond.
- DS. (1999). CALM 2000 for Archives upgrade.
- Goss, S. (2013). Facilitating access to archival material: The creation of EAD records for the online archive of California. *PMLA Quarterly*, 77(2), 157-163.
- Greene, M. A., & Meissner, D. (2005). More product, less process: Pragmatically revamping traditional processing approaches to deal with late 20th-century collections. *The American Archivist*, 66, 208-263.
- Gwinth-Becker, K. (2014). Kill the finding aid! Give the public the ability to really search our history. *Giving history a future: Let's talk about innovative solutions and technologies to deliver robust digital archives*.
- Higgins, R. (1998). A case study of EAD implementation at Durham University Library Archives and Special Collections. *Archives and Museum Informatics*, 12, 221-234.
- Higgins, S., Hilton, C., & Dafis, L. L. (2014). Archives context and discovery: rethinking arrangement and description for the digital age. In *2nd annual conference of the International Council on Archives*, 11-15 October 2014, Girona, Spain. Girona.
- Higgins, S., & Inglis, G. (2003). Implementing EAD: the experience of the NANSTE project. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 24(2), 199-214.
- Hill, A., Stocking, W., & Higgins, S. (2006). Different strokes for different folks: Presenting EAD in three UK online catalogues. *Journal of Archival Organization*, 3(2-3), 183-206.
- International Council on Archives. (1992a). ISAD(G): General international standard archival description. *Archivaria*, 34, 17-32.
- International Council on Archives. (1992b). Statement of principles regarding archival description. *Archivaria*, 34(1), 8-16.
- International Council on Archives. (2000). ISAD(G): General international standard archival description.
- Johnston, D. (2001). From typescript finding aids to EAD (Encoded Archival Description). A university case study. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 22(1), 39-52.
- MacNeil, H. (2002). The context is all: Describing a fonds and its parts in accordance with the Rules for Archival Description. In *The archival fonds: From theory to practice* (pp. 195-229).
- McCrea, D. E. (2006). Getting more for less: Testing a new processing model at the University of Montana. *The American Archivist*, 69(Fall-Winter), 284-290.
- Meehan, J. (2009). Making the leap from parts to whole: Evidence and inference in archival arrangement and description. *The American Archivist*, 72(1), 72-90.
- Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards. (2008). *Rules for archival description*. Ottawa, Canada.
- Riley, J., & Shepherd, K. (2009). A brave new world: Archivists and shareable descriptive metadata. *The American Archivist*, 72(Spring / Summer), 91-112.
- Sweet, M. (2001). The internationalisation of EAD (Encoded Archival Description). *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 22(1), 33-38.
- Yakel, E. (2004). Encoded Archival Description: Are Finding Aids Boundary Spammers or Barriers for Users? *Journal of Archival Organization*, 2, 63-76.
- Yakel, E., Shaw, S., & Reynolds, P. (2007). Creating the next generation of archival finding aids. *D-Lib Magazine*, 13 (May/June).
- Yeo, G. (2012a). Bringing things together: Aggregate records in a digital age. *Archivaria*, 74(Fall), 43-91.
- Yeo, G. (2012b). The conceptual fonds and the physical collection. *Archivaria*, 73(Spring), 43-80.
- Zhang, J. (n.d.). Original Order in Digital Archives. *Archivaria*, 74(Fall 2012), 167-193.