

PERSONAL PAPERS AND THE TREATMENT OF ARCHIVAL PRINCIPLES

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In an article in the August issue of this journal on the treatment of personal papers, Mr Graeme Powell reaches conclusions which appear to have far-reaching implications. Any serious thesis that one of the cardinal rules of arrangement and description has little or no application to a significant type of records material must be regarded with the utmost concern. We may indeed need to be convinced that personal papers are unique among record types in falling outside the accepted canons of arrangement. Perhaps we will consider that if any distinction can be drawn it really is, as he suggests, between the approaches of the archivist and the manuscripts librarian rather than any allowable difference between personal papers and all other kinds of archives materials. In any event, we will be grateful to him for so succinct and capable an exposition of a position which, though one may disagree with it, certainly poses a case to answer.

The substance of his case is that the principle of original order in arrangement ought not to be applied in the normal course to personal papers for two reasons which are explored at some length:

- (a) because in many groups of personal papers the original order cannot be discerned; and
- (b) because in any case other arrangements are to be preferred.

There is, however, a third premiss, not so fully or explicitly examined, which is crucial to the conclusion:

- (c) that there is a distinction between 'public' and 'private' archives of a kind that warrants a departure in the case of personal papers from the basic principles of arrangement.

This third premiss is a very important one because it is more than just a general restatement of the first two. There are no grounds for rejecting a valid principle simply because it fails to apply in particular instances. Exceptions prove rules, they do not invalidate them. Every custodian will know of archives — 'public', 'private', commercial, corporate, ecclesiastical, or brindled — to which the principle of original order cannot sensibly be applied. It cannot reasonably be argued that the principle is therefore invalid. Only if it is accepted that there are differences between 'public' and 'private' archives of a relevant kind does such a conclusion make any sense. A preference for other arrangements in treating personal papers is, however, open to precisely the same objections that can be made to the application of other arrangements to any type of archives material because:

- (a) in principle, original order (where it can be discerned) ought not to be abandoned in the arrangement of any archives material (including personal papers);
- (b) in fact, the incidence of groups of personal papers lacking original order is not so relatively high as to warrant abandoning the accepted principles of arrangement; and

- (c) in practice, consideration of the problem of lack of original order in personal papers cannot be separated from the consideration of the problem as it applies to the whole range of record types.

It would be better, after all, if instead of becoming a measure of the differences between them there could be some agreement on the validity of the fundamental principles of arrangement which could find expression in similarities of practice in archives offices and the manuscripts sections of libraries. Where such differences are drawn, however, the archivist must defend himself against any suggestion of doctrinal dogmatism or lack of professional concern for his users. The Government Archivist does not feel that 'he should not interfere with the existing arrangement of his records because his primary obligation is to the government and the courts, and not to historians' (p.261). An archivist, government or otherwise, feels that his primary obligation is to the records, to preserve and maintain them in their original fonds and in their original order. He believes that in so doing he is serving the needs both of government and the historians. He does not always expect to convince others of the correctness of his position, but he is still surprised and perhaps a little pained to find it suggested that he is therefore less dedicated to the service of the scholar than the librarian who 'serves only one master' (p.262). The two needs must be balanced to be sure — just as the manuscripts librarian must balance the needs of the donor against the needs of the user — but this is not an instance in which any question of precedence between the two arises. The government archivist preserves original order because this is consonant with his duty to preserve the records for posterity. He resists a demand to abandon it whether that demand comes from historians or from government itself. Records should be kept in their original order principally because original order best serves the needs of all users, now and in the future. The archivist does not take this view simply because the question of what is of value to the historian is not the 'only valid question' (p.262) for him.

Preservation of original order is a cardinal principle of arrangement; but to suggest that it is followed slavishly and inflexibly by archivists is quite misleading. The body of writings on archives arrangement and classification covers all the problems raised by Mr Powell and more. Jenkinson himself had much to do with the standard classification of English parish records which is still used in many English county record offices today and with questions of classification generally; and it is perhaps well that he can be allowed to speak in the archivist's defence on this question (which he referred to as the 'standardization of method') against the charge of rigid orthodoxy:

It may be questioned . . . whether quite so rigid an application of principle is desirable, or at any rate possible, in all cases . . . On the other hand the few great principles which have governed and must govern the making, and should therefore govern also the classification handling and use, of Archives cannot but be the same everywhere. It has seemed best, therefore, to the present writer to allow these leading principles to emerge . . . without any attempt at the formulation of rules which should cover all individual cases, to show how the same large principles may be applied, invariably, as criteria of correct procedure not only in the matters of

arrangement and classification but upon any and every side of the Archivist's work . . . In most sciences and arts it will be found that special cases can be satisfactorily met by any one who combines a sound theory with ordinary commonsense and both with practical experience. It is that combination that we wish to commend to the archivist.¹

Those who fail to read Jenkinson's *Manual* in this spirit will not see that the 'large principles' of which he wrote, which would comprehend the wide variety in practice necessary to treat the very diverse range of archives materials, were intended as a statement of the invariable 'criteria of correct procedure' not as narrow and inflexible rules to meet 'all individual cases'. It is simply not the case, therefore, that manuscripts librarians 'who have written about arrangement have mainly dealt with the practical difficulties of identifying the original order' (p.260), while 'archival purists' have argued that disordered records 'should be restored to their original order' (p.261) and thought no more about it. The suggestion that manuscripts librarians have been assiduously giving their minds to the problems of arrangement while archivists, 'faithfully following Jenkinson', have 'rigidly applied the principle of original order to personal papers' (p.263) is very less than just to the true state of archives knowledge. Beginning with the *Manual* of Muller, Feith, and Fruin, one of the earliest general texts on archives arrangement to have become readily available, in which the question of arrangement of disordered or unordered records is dealt with in whole or in part under sections 17 to 36, archivists have treated the question of arrangement fully and at length. Much of the work of the British Records Association on family and estate papers and many articles in the pages of the professional journals attest to the application of archivists to the special problems of personal papers. It might be questioned whether, within the literature, it is really very easy to distinguish quite so absolutely as Mr Powell suggests between the writings on arrangement by manuscripts librarians on the one hand and by archivists on the other, but if archivists have written less than manuscripts librarians about alternative systems of arrangement for records where an original order can be discerned this is simply because they usually feel (for what they regard as very good reasons) that no real case for alternative arrangement can be sustained.

It is important, even at the risk of seeming to be an 'archival purist', to affirm the pertinence of certain principles of arrangement to all records (including personal papers) if only because these principles have been established very much with the needs of the user — not just today's user but also the user of tomorrow — in mind. It is important also to point out, when necessary, that these principles inform a body of practice which is both flexible and comprehensive. If librarians think they know better they should, of course, say so; but if archivists (and, one hopes, some manuscripts librarians) neglect to accept proposed modifications to a well-established practice the librarians ought not to be surprised to learn that the insights they think to give into the treatment of certain kinds of material have been fully considered and cogently rejected.

The general case for preferring original order can be stated as:

- (a) that other arrangements destroy the evidential value imparted

to individual documents or groups of documents by their associations and relationships with each other and with the whole;

- (b) that other arrangements destroy the total sum of the meaning of the whole — the evidential value of the arrangement itself both as to the intention of the creator and as to the last practical use to which the records were put;
- (c) that original order provides a standard form of presentation on the only principle that can be justified to all users;
- (d) that original order allows depositors to refer to the records; and
- (e) that original order will ensure that original internal cross-references remain operative.

Respect for original order does not depend upon there being an original numeration or alphabetisation to follow and it is not to be discarded merely because original order was unchartered or uncontrived. The best analogy is with the work of the archaeologist who does not abandon principles governing excavation work merely because instead of digging out a well ordered and well planned tomb in which placement and arrangement have been designed by its builders to impart meaning and significance he is working on a rubbish heap; he knows the importance of juxtapositioning and relationships between the parts of a whole, even where the whole was never envisaged as such in the first place. This is equally true of archives work. The mere fact that this is the position of an 'archival purist' should not lead anyone to conclude that there are not very good reasons why it should be so. It is wrong to conclude, as Mr Powell does on p.261, that record materials which are not subject to present-day registry numbering and titling cannot and ought not to be treated in accordance with the principles of arrangement, for two very good reasons:

- (a) because original order can be discerned in unnumbered (and even in untitled) records; and
- (b) because the principles of arrangement include an extensive consideration of the problems of unnumbered and untitled material.

The change from chronological 'registration', scheduling, and registration by enrolment to modern registry numbering, filing, and titling, by which Mr Powell distinguishes the records of government from personal papers, is a very late development. Amongst English-language records, contemporary numbering systems do not appear to have come into general use until the second half of the eighteenth century. The principles of arrangement evolved around the treatment of materials the bulk of which consisted of records which were unnumbered, mostly untitled, and which had never been subject to registry procedures as we understand them.

As Mr Powell justly points out (p.261), the records of government agencies often reach the custodian in a mess, but this is less likely to occur where there is an effective records management programme which ensures early transfer to archives custody and identification of record keeping system well before the records have reached the stage of disorder. Personal papers, by their very nature, cannot be subjected

to records management procedures in the same way as the records of an organisation with its own archives arrangements — not even the personal papers generated by individuals within an organisation can be given the same degree of 'pre-archival' management as registry records; but those who have experience of seeing personal papers during their active stage will know that system is more often than not employed — not always system as a registry clerk would understand it, but system nevertheless. Admittedly, the personal papers more often encountered by archivists in this country — those of Ministers of State and public servants in the case of the government archivist and those of business executives or senior administrators in the case of business, corporate, or university archivists — are more likely to be systematically handled anyway than those of outstanding individuals in other fields which more frequently come the way of the manuscripts librarian. Perhaps some manuscripts librarians fail to appreciate the degree to which order and method can exist in personal papers because, as Mr Powell says, by the time the librarian sees them 'they have often been stored for years in trunks, cupboards, and garages, or they may have been weeded and rearranged every time the owner changed house' (p.261). Even in the case of the small household assemblage of papers order, often of a bizarre kind, can frequently be discerned. Generally, however, order can be expected more often in larger groups of papers than in smaller groups which may indeed be kept in heaps or loose in drawers. True cases of unordered or disordered documents are susceptible to other arrangements. When one is dealing with unfiled documents, it becomes necessary to subject them to some sort of filing process so as to group them in a meaningful way. Technically, one is grouping them into 'items' and then grouping the items into 'series'. Usually such documents have missed out on the record-making stage and so the custodian has to assume the role of the active 'record-maker', but it should always be clear to the user that such artificial items and series are not authentic but creations of the custodian. Even where papers are already grouped into items, files, or bundles, there may often be no meaningful order or method and here again there is little to quarrel with in imposing an order over chaos and doing so on principles which take into account the needs of the users of the material. It is hard to believe, however, that any historian with a regard for the rules of historical evidence could value the dismemberment of original items and re-sorting of the documents into artificial sequences or the rearrangement of organised runs of items or documents into one or several sequences according to the notions of the custodian of the records.

The real point at issue then does not concern the arrangement of unordered or irretrievably disordered papers but the application of alternative principles of arrangement to all personal papers. Mr Powell concludes, quite rightly in my view, that rearrangement by subject is usually impracticable (p.264). There may be a stronger case to be made for arrangement by form than he allows, but in principle there is little substantially to quarrel with in his views on arrangement by activity. The real objection, it seems to me, is that he is laying down a principle for dealing with personal papers with an injunction that it

should be applied very nearly as rigidly as he complains others apply the principle of original order. If the converse of the 'rigid' application of principle may be regarded as flexibility instead of the equally rigid application of a different principle, then it seems to me that the true position is that in different cases where there is disorder any one of the various approaches canvassed (even, in rare instances, subject arrangement) may be suitable. There are others — chronological arrangement, for example — which one would wish to apply in other cases. What will determine it is not some preconceived notion of what is the best kind of arrangement but the nature and character of the particular records on which one is working. On the whole, however, original order is to be preferred except in those cases where it is not discernable.

Perhaps one reason the archivist remains unconvinced that there are differences between personal papers and all other kinds of records of a relevant kind which make the application of the principles of arrangement inappropriate is that he sees exactly the same problems of disarrangement and lack of original arrangement among large bodies of what Mr Powell calls 'public' archives. The problem is by no means unique to personal papers. Original arrangement is very often lacking in records of institutions. Rearrangement and disorder resulting from neglect are often as great a problem in dealing with 'public' archives as with personal papers and in some organisations large quantities of records are uncontrolled by established filing procedures. Records just do not fall into two neat categories of registered, well-ordered, 'official' filing on the one hand and idiosyncratic and inconsistently filed personal papers on the other. There are many kinds of records — not just 'public' and 'private' — just as there are many degrees of orderliness. There is no simple equation between the kind of record and the degree of orderliness. Some organisational records will be orderly and some will not. On the whole, personal papers will more often be disorderly than most other kinds of records; that is as much as can be said. The relative orderliness of an assemblage of personal papers depends on the habits of tidiness of the individual concerned, whether he had secretarial assistance, the quantity of paper he maintained, and how closely his personal papers were associated with any official activity he may have undertaken in some enterprise. Generally, personal papers of Ministers of State, for example, or company directors show more order and method than the personal papers of misanthropic poets not in the enjoyment of a sinecure — which is just what one would expect. By the same token, the records of large central Departments of State usually show more order and method than those of small one-man outposts in administrative backwaters. In some government agencies, the quantity of papers under rudimentary or no control equals or exceeds the quantity neatly filed between numbered and titled covers. If any case is to be made for abandoning original order, it can be applied equally to all disordered material not merely to personal papers because it is neither true that the overwhelming proportion of personal papers is in fact lacking in order to start with, nor the case that disorder, where it occurs, is a problem unique to personal papers.

It may seem that this question is best resolved by appealing to

statistics on the actual quantities of personal papers which show disorder as against those which are well ordered. It will be difficult, however, to give generally acceptable figures because, as we have seen, different custodians will cite the experience of different kinds of personal papers and because in order to obtain the figures there would have to be, what has not so far been given, some agreed definition of original order. Any attempt at such a definition would require another article (at least) in its own right. It must be emphasised, however, that orderliness is not itself a defining characteristic of distinct categories of records. Just because records are not as well ordered as they might be it does not follow that they are unordered; it is a question of degree, not of absolute and disjunctive differences between record types.

Schellenberg, describing an earlier debate on the principles of arrangement, cites Fruin's view that 'archives are designed in the first place to clarify the administrative activities of government agencies',² and in the absence of a more detailed general statement of what original order is, this definition by purpose is perhaps the best one to apply to all archives materials. The value of original order is the insight it gives into the purposes and activities which the records originally served and does not depend on its efficiency as a filing or retrieval system. Schellenberg himself goes too far when he says that most modern systems of filing are 'from an archivist's point of view . . . notoriously bad, because they do not show how records were accumulated in relation to the activities to which they pertain', but we may agree that preserving disorder as evidence of disorder in administration 'is obviously carrying logic too far'.³ Original order is the result of a filing process contemporary with the production of the records, of keeping the documents in some kind of systematic way. Disorder or lack of order, which frequently occurs, is a result either of a deficiency or a breakdown in the system or of an absence of system to start with (or, of course, subsequent reordering). Where there was no system to start with, and there is no real disagreement about this, the custodian will have to establish an order for the material and how this may best be done is discussed in the literature. Where there is a deficiency or breakdown in the system, it is a question of judgement, also discussed in the literature both in general terms and in relation to particular types of records, as to how far the original system should be restored to or extended over the disordered material — how far, in other words, the deficiency or breakdown should be repaired. In this latter case, no custodian can go far wrong who seeks, as far as it is reasonably possible to do so, to put records 'back into the state in which contemporary needs obliged them to be kept'.⁴

Even where a group of randomly-ordered documents comes to the custodian as a result of the processes of weeding, re-sorting, neglect, or decay over time, which is inevitably the fate of some records, it is sometimes possible to re-establish the original order. Some of the most interesting jobs of arrangement and description are exactly of this kind and a very high order of skill and judgement is required. There comes a point, of course, where one genuinely decides that there was no original order, that it has been irretrievably lost, or that it is not worth the time and effort involved in putting it back together

again; but that is a very different position from wantonly imposing a new order on documents or files where it is possible to preserve the original. It is not always easy to decide at what point it becomes unprofitable to go on seeking to restore an original order which is difficult to discern or which has been lost. It is one of those cases of combining ordinary common sense with sound theory and practical experience, because, as Jenkinson realised, there is no clear demarcation between the realms of order and disorder and amongst records of all kinds there is a great variety which does not easily yield to the formulation of crude and facile rules of arrangement. Few records are perfectly well ordered just as few are completely unordered; most fall somewhere in between and a judgement must first be made in each particular case as to the degree to which disorder or lack of order makes re-ordering necessary before one sets about dismembering an arrangement which may have evidential value for the researcher.

Muller, Feith, and Fruin emphasise the 'organic' nature of archives materials. It is for this reason (and not as Mr Powell supposes, owing to any 'rigid' application of principle or lack of concern for the 'practical difficulties of identifying original order' that the 'rules which govern the composition, the arrangement and the formation of an archival collection . . . cannot be fixed by the archivist in advance'.⁵ The term original order, however defined, is really no more than a shorthand way of referring to the custodian's efforts, through his arrangement, to maintain the integrity, authenticity, and impartiality as evidence of the records. Muller, Feith, and Fruin go on to explain why this cannot easily be done by expounding simple rules of arrangement for universal application.

Every archival collection has . . . as it were, its own personality, its individuality, which the archivist must become acquainted with before he can proceed to its arrangement. Consequently, in the rules which follow there is a careful avoidance of giving any scheme for archival arrangement and grouping. Every archival collection, be it understood first of all, must be treated in its own way, and this manual has no other purpose than to suggest the means of becoming acquainted with the structure of a collection and of deriving from what is learned about it the principles of its arrangement. It is not the first 'systematizer' that one meets—and still less the first historian—who is competent to arrange the archival collection, but only one who has studied its organisation.⁶

The restoration of original order is, therefore, not the artless operation that it may first appear. It is not as Mr Powell suggests (p.261), a matter merely of leaving records in the state in which they are received. In a recently published work on archives administration, J. H. Hodson has described the process:

Collections are rarely received by the archivist in the order in which he will decide to arrange them. This may seem to contravene the maxim that the archivist must preserve the original archive order. It is a subtle, delicate process, but, like a surgeon, an archivist must be firm, while remaining sensitive to the nature of the organism he is operating on. From his first sight of a collection to the last catalogue entry he makes, the archivist adapts his treatment of the collection to an unspoken assessment of its character, its age, its comprehensiveness, its physical condition, its order, its housing, its use.⁷

The custodian who values original order cannot agree that, except in the 'few' cases where original order is seen to be 'significant' (p.263),

personal papers should be arranged so that 'where possible series should relate to activities, with the remaining papers divided by form' (p.265). Following his principles of arrangement, 'faithfully' he hopes but not 'rigidly', he will prefer original order where it can be discerned and, generally, only where this proves to be impossible will he consider alternative arrangements. The difference, however, is not simply a difference in emphasis. The key is in the word *significant*. In one sense, the significance of original order is just that it is not 'significant'. The custodian deliberately makes no judgement as to the 'significance' of the original order in particular cases and confines the exercise of his judgement to discerning what original order was, if any. No one denies that in some cases original order is demonstrably significant. For example, in a group of Ministerial papers there are two sequences of correspondence, one for replies prepared by the Ministerial staff and the other for replies prepared by the Department — exactly the same in every other respect. No one would suggest that these papers should be re-ordered on an activity basis or any other. What is at issue is the arrangement to be accorded papers where an original order can be discerned but it has no discernable significance for the person arranging the records — and it is to be stressed that this is just as much a question in arranging all other kinds of archives material as it is in treating personal papers.

In very many groups of personal papers (though by no means all) individual documents are associated together by their originator in what in the Australian Archives is called the 'record item' and what in the Public Record Office in London is called the 'piece'. Each item or piece consists of one or more documents. Mr Powell writes more about the problems of arrangement at the level of the class or series and at the level of the individual document because he thinks that 'personal papers differ from archives in that there are often no files or bundles at all' (p.261). Like his other generalisations about personal papers, this is only partly true. It may be, once again, that the archivist is more aware of the original item in dealing with personal papers because of the kind of personal papers he sees and because he more often sees them before they are weeded and reorganised. Most Ministers of State, officials, administrators, and executives keep large portions of their personal papers in docketts, files, or bundles, in suspension files, or in concertina files simply because they handle so much paper that they must have some way, however rudimentary, of finding what they want when they want it. Amongst some other kinds of personal papers, files and bundles are, as Mr Powell says, less typical.

One of the principal objections to the work of the nineteenth-century 'methodisers', of course, was that they too largely ignored the original record item (the piece) and rearranged papers into artificial classes of documents which bore little or no relation to the original form of the records. A major objection to artificial classes of this kind is that they do not stand the test of time by the measure of their own principal justification — that of 'usefulness' to the researcher. Mr Powell, discussing the arrangement of items (documents) within series or sub-series, about which archivists, unlike manuscripts librarians, are supposed to not 'have written a great deal', states that the 'real solution'

to the problem of incoming and outgoing correspondence is to arrange all the letters by date, with replies attached to the incoming letters, and then to index them (p.265). What he is in fact describing is the correspondence file, the use of which is justifiable, presumably, since no other reason is given, on the grounds that it is 'of value to the historian'. But the file, like television, is a twentieth-century invention (or at any rate late nineteenth). It seems to us now as a model of good sense and we wonder how they ever did without it. Do without it they did, however, and to the nineteenth-century 'methodiser' the natural, sensible, and logical way to arrange papers was to have separate chronological sequences of inwards and outwards letters because this was the way current records were kept then. This is in fact how many of the large groups of personal papers (and indeed other archives) arranged during the nineteenth century appear today. Bringing the two sequences together only appears natural and sensible, or 'of value' if you happen to live now and not then; and the important thing about arrangement is that whatever you decide upon now others have to live with for many years to come. The nineteenth-century 'methodiser' would have argued with equal force the merits of his arrangement against those of Mr Powell's. It is hard to resist the conclusion, therefore, that once original order is abandoned one's approach to arrangement is conditioned by one's expectations about the way papers ought to be kept, in line with one's experience of current filing practices, and that the 'value' of an arrangement imported into a group of papers at a particular time will diminish as filing practices and expectations about what is the best way to file papers change and develop.

It is unclear whether or not Mr Powell is advocating dismemberment of record items into artificial classes of documents. It was not my impression that this was the practice in Australian manuscript libraries and perhaps this point requires amplification.

Where an individual groups his papers into files, bundles, or docketts — and this is most typically the case with the larger part of the papers of officials and administrators in government, business, and other organised enterprises — then it would be most unwise to break them up into 'series' of activity-related mini-files or docketts. The very fact that an individual keeps files on some matters and not on others is in itself evidence of his preoccupations and activities; the quantity of papers, for example, which a Minister of State keeps on special subjects — mining, the Baltic States, the A.B.C., French nuclear tests, the Middle East and so on — can be significant but much more so is whether or not documents on a particular subject, in whatever quantity, were filed as a separate group or interfiled among documents of a broader or different subject. Perhaps the most interesting subject files are those for named individuals or organisations as subjects; documents in a file on Jones among Smith's papers, comprising correspondence with and material on Jones and kept in a sequence of subject files or dossiers, have a significance which would be lost if they were re-sorted into a sequence of Smith's general correspondence. Mr Powell asserts that alphabetical or chronological arrangements may be discarded (p.263); but within an assemblage of papers any original grouping of documents can have a significance which is not at first

apparent. The separation of documents dealing with similar matters, for example, might indicate which were freely available to an individual's personal staff and colleagues and which were for his own exclusive use. In other cases, regrouping papers throws a completely false light on the significance which particular documents originally had; many prominent individuals, to take an extreme example, keep 'Nut Files' for appropriate correspondence and for these letters to be refiled according to some artificial principle of arrangement applied uniformly to the entire assemblage would be to give them a weight of significance which they never had in the original. The list of questions to be considered before re-sorting is contemplated is long and the issues raised would appear to be of the greatest importance, not least to the critical historian, for the interpretation of the assemblage as a whole and of the individual documents within it.

Currently, the more usual arrangements of personal papers, especially in the larger accretions, are into alphabetical subject files, alphabetical name files (for correspondence with persons, organisations, portfolios, divisions, etc.), or, less frequently, chronological files or docketts. One recent consignment of personal papers to the Australian Archives, admittedly unusual but not unique, consisted of files arranged by the donor according to a very idiosyncratic but nevertheless clearly discernable multiple number filing system with part sub-files. As with all other kinds of file making, current practices will change over time, just as they have in the past. Other accumulations of personal papers, sometimes large but more frequently small, show no evidence of grouping into files, bundles, or docketts and must be treated as arrangements of separate documents while still others come as a random assemblage of individual files or documents. It is just not possible to generalise about it.

Mr Powell divides the arrangement of archives into two processes: arrangement within a repository (governed by the principle of *respect des fonds* or respect for provenance) and arrangement within each record group or collection (governed by the *registraturprinzip* or the principle of respect for original order); and, while accepting the validity of the principle of provenance, he questions the relevance of original order (p.259). The two processes of arrangement are not quite so distinct as this, however, and ought not to be accepted or rejected independently of each other. Order and provenance are often closely connected. In all aspects of arrangement, the greatest care must always be taken not to obscure the provenance of the records through rearrangement. The archive of one individual, for example, may result from separate deposits from several sources (members of the family, business, or other enterprises, colleagues or staff) and the different lines of transmission ought not to be obscured by casual rearrangement. Multiple-provenance series,⁸ which occur amongst 'public' archives, also appear, as Mr Powell recognizes (p.260), amongst personal papers. Family papers as well as containing series of individuals alone will normally include some series which are the creation jointly of a number of individuals within the family or of succeeding generations. The individual who is responsible for the creation of records which are part of one family archive may also be wholly or partly responsible for

other series which are separately part of the archive of a second family (as a result of marriage or inheritance) or of an enterprise in which he was involved. No attempt should, therefore, be made to intersort series or documents within series without taking account of this because the original order may indicate differences in provenance within the archive group. An individual's papers, for example, kept as a discrete series of 'personal correspondence', should normally be kept separate from 'family' series or series resulting from the individual's participation in an enterprise, even where the latter are a significant portion of the individual's own archive. Any individual who is associated with an organised enterprise is likely to have amongst his papers series which are to some extent part of several archive groups. If, for example, Smith has run a family property, been a Minister of State, and became secretary of the local golf club, all series amongst his papers will have Smith as their creator; but there will also be series which have a shared provenance with other members of the family and/or the Department of State for which he was Minister and/or the golf club. It may also happen that the archive of one individual will contain portion of the archive of another whose relationship was official rather than familial; a Treasurer's papers, for example, will contain series compiled by the 'Minister Assisting the Treasurer' which may themselves consist of the papers of a number of different individuals whose only association was that they assisted the same Treasurer at different times; or a Prime Minister's Press Secretary will compile series resulting from the period in office of a succession of incumbents, inextricably mixed with each other in subject folders. Rearrangement can only be effected by accepting one aspect of the provenance, arranging the documents upon the basis of that alone, and arbitrarily rejecting (and therefore abandoning) all of the others. As with 'public' archives, cross-indexing is not sufficient especially if rearrangement is allowed to take place; the only really satisfactory solution (short of giving, in effect, full series descriptions to each document) is to leave series in their original order and attribute them simultaneously to all persons and enterprises of whose transactions they formed a part. At any rate, the only possible way of maintaining all aspects of provenance, however the series is described, is by retaining the original order because in many cases original order is the best guide to the provenance.

Mr Powell does not deny that there may be 'significance' in any arrangement; but he can only offer subjective criteria for deciding the question. Filing by 'activity', 'subject', 'event', 'organization', or 'idea' will 'normally' be significant, and filing by 'alphabetical' or 'chronological' arrangement will 'not normally' be significant (p.263). On this basis, the custodian, in deciding which original order to discard and which to retain, can only follow his own notions of what may or may not be 'significant' to the researcher. The only general guide he has is an opinion, inevitably contemporary and subjective, as to the types of arrangement he can most often expect to discard. The question here is not of the merits of this or any other judgement about significance. It is the express role of the custodian not to make such judgements because there are no universally acceptable criteria for

doing so. Equally, there are no universally applicable criteria for deciding what alternative arrangement to adopt or how it is to be applied. It is to be emphasised, therefore, that the argument is not about whether the judgement is right or wrong but about whether it should be made at all.

It is to be regretted that historians and other users do not express their views more often and more explicitly on the questions of arrangement since a good deal of the custodian's work is based on assumptions about what the user's needs are. The wealth of modern records (compared with the survivals of mediaeval and earlier times) and the difficulty in handling such large volumes of material raise questions of how far some attempt should be made at 'pre-digestion' either by editing for publication, by calendaring, or by rearrangement for easier retrieval. The custodian looks to the scholar for advice in helping him make up his mind on how far to go and where to draw the line. G. R. Elton, writing in 1967, of the problem of producing 'sound and trustworthy history' even where circumstances do not permit the historian to see everything, concludes that 'there should be rules of scholarship applicable in such very common cases to ensure that even a partial view of the evidence avoids the uncertainties of personal selection'.⁹ His views on calendaring provide some indication of the needs and interests of historians which are pertinent also to arrangement because he touches on questions of provenance and original order:

The most obvious solution to the dilemma consists of relying on the preliminary work of others . . . Such ground-clearing operations are the better the more closely they adhere to the state of the material as they found it and the less they permit the editor to intrude. Thus the least dangerous of them are those that take a given body of records and without rearranging it present it in abstracts . . . Less satisfactory, and full of dangers to be remembered, are calendars which comprise materials chosen by the editor on some non-archival principle. The famous *Calendar of Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, for instance, collected in chronological order all the material for the reign which its compilers could find or accommodate . . . the manner of its composition was responsible for two traps characteristic of the method and quite independent of any bias in the compiler. Since it did not simply describe one existing archive, it gave a quite misleading impression of completeness; and since its makers rearranged their materials in a pattern chosen by themselves (in this case chronological) they destroyed the original arrangement and deprived the historian of much important knowledge. The provenance of documents—the way in which they came to be produced and deposited—is one of their most telling aspects, and this is something that, disastrously, cannot be established from that calendar . . . In this instance the originals do not assist because some devil prompted the Public Record Office to rebind their share of the material—the greater part of what was used—in the order of the calendar.¹⁰

The sort of evidence which the historian looks for in any archives material is often at the level of what can be revealed by a discrete document. The fact that Brown wrote such and such a thing to Green on such and such a date is the only significant thing about it for some researchers. Other sorts of evidence which the document can provide in its original order and in its original context are manifold. Sometimes the custodian can see it, sometimes he cannot. No custodian should set himself up to judge for the researcher whether or not an original

order will have significance, nor is it possible to discern all the different insights which different researchers may derive from the original order at different times. Who can predict, for example, whether or not the juxtaposition of one document with another will indicate something to a researcher, perhaps in possession of other evidence of which the custodian was unaware, as to when it was received or how it was used? The most that the custodian can do is to present the documents with a guarantee that where there was an original order to be discerned the researcher sees it without modification, that he is, therefore, in a position to evaluate what evidence if any he feels it can provide, and that his conclusions can then be tested by other researchers who are guaranteed access to the same fundamental facts of arrangement and juxtaposition. This guarantee does not depend on whether or not the custodian himself was able to foresee the kind of conclusion which the researcher might be able to draw from the evidence; it depends on the custodian being dedicated to the principle that where an original order could be discerned it has been preserved and nothing has been done which might detract from or add to the significance of any evidential value which it might have.

It is, of course, true that in some cases one's best judgement would be that the original order may not be particularly significant. For the custodian of any kind of unique material, however, whether it be in an archives, museum, art gallery, or library, it is as true today as it was in 1931 when the British Records Association laid it down that:

The principle governing all operations such as making-up, handling, repairing, etc., should be that the custodian should endeavour to add nothing to, and take nothing from, his Archives, however insignificant the addition or subtraction may seem.¹¹

Finally, one either regards oneself as a custodian of unique material or one does not. If archivists and manuscripts librarians really do differ on that (and it is to be hoped that, in the main, they do not), at least it cannot be because one kind of unique material differs from another. Anyone, manuscripts librarian or archivist, who sought to import an artificial arrangement not simply into records which have no order to start with but into records the original arrangement of which he regarded as 'insignificant', and who did this moreover on the grounds that he had 'only one master' (the user standing on the other side of the counter at this moment), could not but abandon the role of custodian, and the interests so served are more likely to be eclectic and contemporary than scholarly and historical.

Both current and future demands must, of course, be served. There is, however, only one way in which this can be done — by preserving, where it exists, any empirically verifiable evidential value which the materials themselves may sustain. Original order may not be the most convenient for all users. It is the job of the custodian to make sure that other needs are met through ancillary finding aids, but clearly the needs of one group or type of user at one particular time ought not to be served by sacrificing the needs of other groups or types of user for all time. Original order may not be the best way of satisfying the needs of some users, but it is the only way of satisfying (albeit sometimes less than perfectly) the needs of all users.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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