

Parallel Provenance: (2) When something is not related to everything else

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This is a continuation of the article on 'Parallel Provenance' that appeared in the previous issue of this journal. The sub-title above refers to 'Part 6' of the author's article 'Relationships in Records' that bore the title, 'Everything is Related to Something Else' ('New Zealand Archivist' Autumn 2004).

How then to judge the truth? How to decide whether we are in the realm of the imagination or in reality? One trick is to see things from different perspectives, recognising that stories and songs both express their truths in more or less direct communication and reveal them in words and images that we must interpret ... The word 'witness' ... refers both to the testament given and to the individual

giving it; in the Bible, the Greek word ... is the root of our English word 'martyr'. This sets truth-telling alongside suffering, which seems to settle responsibility onto the teller rather than the tale, with the test being the teller's credibility. But we know there is more to it than that.¹

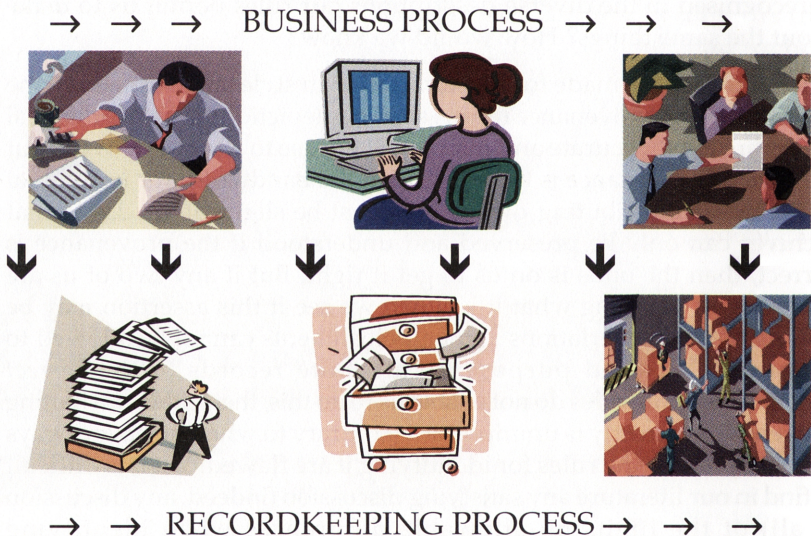
Describing the same records, archivists seldom produce identical witness, although adherence to descriptive rules is meant to preserve authenticity by ensuring that a correct view of the material being described is preserved. Perhaps archival descriptions are rarely tested for this because archivists deal in unique materials. Differences can be accounted for by the unique characteristics of each 'unit of description'. But what if it goes deeper than that? What if descriptions do not conform to a uniform way of portraying common characteristics? What if our principles and practice are so incoherent that parallel provenance exists unrecognised in the diverse descriptions our rules permit us to make about the same things? How would we know?

Once allowance is made for some variation in style and expression, the need to *preserve* provenance means that our depictions must be identical if they are to be 'accurate and reliable'. If the use to which archivists put the idea of provenance is to be justified, the bandwidth for individual differences in attributing ownership must be slight. If we assert that archives can only be preserved and understood if the provenance is correct, then the onus is on us to get it right. But if any two of us are incapable of agreeing what it is when we see it this assertion may be doubted. Artistic variations and embellishments cannot be allowed to suborn the avowed purpose: to attribute records to the *correct* provenance. If the rules do not enable us to do this, then either attributing provenance correctly is unimportant (contrary to what we have always believed) or else the rules for identifying it are flawed. Yet it is difficult to find in our literature any satisfying discussion (indeed, any discussion at all) of the limits on allowable differences when identifying provenance. How far may two archivists disagree about it before one or both is deemed to be in error?

There are many sides to the truth to which archivists are witness in their descriptions. Before stating who *formed* the records, we must identify what it is that they have formed. The 'unit of description' must not fall from the sky or form itself overnight under a cabbage leaf. Remember the unicorn. Disagree over what to describe and there will

be disparity over whom to ascribe it to. The disputed statement of principles accompanying the first draft of the ICA descriptive rules gave at least one certainty with which to simplify and resolve such dilemmas. The *fonds* (and its component parts) was *something* – something formed, concrete, tangible, and unchanging that could be described. It was not, as Australians understand it, a *view* – a method for combining units of description into collectivities reflecting their manifold circumstances and adventures (in short, their stories). Rules that identify units of description as component parts of something else (*composition*) will produce a different outcome from rules that treat them as episodes in a narrative formed by perceived connections with other entities (*relationship*) – unless some unifying theory is employed.

In its purest form, parallel provenance is encapsulated in what I have sometimes called the cabbage patch paradigm (see below):



On this view of the world, records are created in a business process and organised in a recordkeeping process into which they fall like relief packages dropping from low-flying aircraft. Provenance derives from business and structure derives from recordkeeping. Every morning recordkeepers go out into the garden to look for records left for them

by business under cabbage leaves from the night before. Description is a recordkeeping process that identifies the agents of formation in the business process (provenance) and documents the organisation of the detritus left by the business process (records management). Although it is seldom expressed this way, the cabbage patch paradigm confers parallel provenance on all documents. The records are undoubtedly created by agents of formation in both processes – the authors and the filers of documents. Kitty Pakenham makes and receives the letters and the Duke of Wellington files them in his bureau.

As has already been alluded to in 'Part 1', the attribution of a single provenance to any document is a dangerous simplification. Filing must involve sequencing documents according to an activity that takes place within the business process. In cyberspace, the search for an underlying logic to the organisation and preservation of documents that is not derived from an ongoing analysis of the flow of work through which documents pass is a fool's errand. Similarly, the idea that the formation of records (and hence their preservation) is supported by different processes to the conduct of business (rather than a seamless integration) is clearly a dead end so far as electronic recordkeeping is concerned. The whole of the digital archiving endeavour is trapped within this *cul de sac*.

Consider the following:

Description One

Series *x* was created by enterprise *k* through the agency of *b*; it was succeeded by series *y* and series *z*.

Description Two

Series *x* was created through the agency of *b* in succession to *a*; it was succeeded by series *y* (created by *b*) and series *z* (created by *c*). Formerly, during the early part of the creation of *x*, agent *b* was part of enterprise *j* before moving to enterprise *k* and some of the responsibilities of *k* subsequently moved to enterprise *m*. Agent *c* inherited control over series *x* following the demise of agent *b* and the transfer of functions from *b* to *c*.

Description Three

Document *m* version 2.09 was authored by *d*, submitted to *e*, and approved by *f*. It was produced as part of **workflow 9876** in **step 5** in **(trans)action 1234**. Recordkeeping control was vested throughout in agent *g* under the authority of agency *b* within enterprise *k*. **Workflow 9876** has been identified as belonging to sequence/series *x* and to sequence/series *w* amongst the records created by enterprise *k*.

These three descriptions are recognisably trying to accomplish the same purpose. The rules (and the accompanying theoretical base) for descriptions two and three, however, are going to be different from the rules underlying description one.² It would, of course, be possible to construct a unifying theory or set of rules that encompassed all three approaches, but this has not been done.³

To whose stories should we listen?

Developing methods to deal with parallel provenance involves an intricate twofold approach. On the one hand, there must be an assault on tradition – exposing limitations of views that are too narrow and confused. On the other hand, tradition must be defended against an indiscriminating application of any old contextualisation without regard for distinctions (whatever they may be) between those which confer true contextual understanding of the contingent circumstances in which records came into being and were used (and which they evidence) and those which do not. We do not respect anything worth having if we only apply received methods, absent an understanding of what they are for. True respect comes from appreciating the purpose for which we strive and it is sustained by refining our methods (or abandoning them altogether and replacing them with better ones, if need be) to ensure that the purposes for which we set out to respect provenance in the first place are met.

It is not necessary to abandon the established provenance perspective, only to recognise its limitations and be open to a richer view. It is a legitimate view, but not the only legitimate view. Ted Chamberlin makes a similar point about the certainty we cherish concerning our title to ownership over land:

... there is *another* title, one that contradicts this idea of exclusive ownership. We need to find a way of believing them both, just as we believe in both a sun that rises and a sun that remains right where it is ... Actually, we already do, so what I am suggesting should come easily. The other title is sometimes called 'underlying' title. We don't think about it from day to day, just as we don't think about the round earth, until we are reminded about our responsibility to the land and to its creator or until the government decides to put a road across our front lawn or build a dam and flood the valley where we live. Then we are made rudely aware of the fact that our title is not quite as true as we thought it was. It is underwritten by a title vested in the nation ... It is a legal fiction, of course; but it shapes the facts of life and of the land ... Underlying title, whatever adjective we apply to it, is a trick, a way of understanding something beyond everyday understanding; but it's a trick the way the theories of science are, or the law, which routinely establishes fictions as fact.⁴

Our view of an exclusive provenance establishes truths we need to believe by ignoring things we don't think about from day to day. It is our story: we are used to telling it, and we believe it. Like our title to land, we have forgotten how arbitrary it is. Now there are other stories to tell – the tale of a stolen child trying to reconstruct the process through which she was passed or that of an Internet transaction in shared work space. We must learn to recognise and recount those stories too.

Consider now the Lord Chancellor's words from *Iolanthe* :

The law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent

It has no kind of fault or flaw; and I m'luds embody the law.

WS Gilbert *Iolanthe* (1888)

Here too is a legal fiction (in more ways than one). Much of Gilbert's humour comes from paradoxes as to identity and relationships (provenance). That is why I suggest descriptive archivists read him – if possible, accompanied by Sullivan's delightful music. The wit in the

Lord Chancellor's song derives from the suggestion (a confusion in fact) about parallel provenance. The excellence of the Law infuses the position of Lord Chancellor and hence the current occupant of the position. Gilbert is humorously suggesting that the Law's excellence 'belongs' also to the Lord Chancellor and to the current occupant. The humour comes because we know it is untrue – whatever excellence there may be in the Law, it does not automatically flow on to either the office or its occupant.

The entities shown in Table 1 are a metaphor for parallel provenance: In Table 2, one way of sorting out the provenance of entities below the dotted line is displayed. Gilbert and Sullivan (an entity conceived of as representing their collaboration along with D'Oyle Carte) is responsible for the production of only one of the works listed here: *Iolanthe*.

*WS Gilbert Arthur Sullivan FC Burnand JMaddison Morton
Walter Scott HW Longfellow Richard D'Oyly Carte*

Bab Ballads	Iolanthe	Ivanhoe	Golden Legend	Lost Chord	Cox & Box
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Table 1. The works of Gilbert and Sullivan

If 'Gilbert and Sullivan' is seen as a corporate entity rather than a collection of individuals,⁵ and as having an existence separate from them as individuals or in other roles, we could add *Ivanhoe*, produced by Gilbert and Sullivan without the participation of Gilbert – and a notable flop.⁶

Provenance	Unit of Description	Provenance	Unit of Description
WS Gilbert	<i>Bab Ballads</i>	Walter Scott	<i>Ivanhoe</i> (novel)
Arthur Sullivan	<i>Lost Chord</i>	Sullivan & Scott	<i>Ivanhoe</i> (opera)
Gilbert & Sullivan #	<i>Iolanthe</i>	H W Longfellow	<i>Golden Legend</i> (poem)
J Maddison Morton	<i>Box & Cox</i> (play)	Sullivan/ Longfellow	<i>Golden Legend</i> (oratorio)
Sullivan & Burnand	<i>Cox & Box</i> (musical)	Carte & Sullivan	<i>Ivanhoe</i> (opera)

includes D'Oyly Carte

Table 2. The Gilbert and Sullivan *fonds*

From a parallel perspective, the work of Sullivan and the work of Gilbert separately (both respectable *fonds* in their own right) intersect and overlap at many points with other *fonds* and with each other.

Multiple provenance and the virtual *fonds*

Peter Scott's purpose was to reconstruct descriptively a *virtual fonds* in place of the fractured and incomplete *physical fonds* existing on the shelf,

disordered, dismembered and dislocated filing systems; misplaced, destroyed or re-numbered files; chaotic and re-arranged records.⁷

Every series is listed on an *inventory of series* for every creator involved in its formation. But these inventories only supplement the *inventory of agencies*:

... our listing of agencies is arranged first by structure and then by date. The primary elements ... are listed in chronological order. We then have separate listings of the subordinate agencies attached to each of the departments or ministries referred to in the primary inventory ... [like series] agencies may also be transferred from one department to another ... An obvious complementary approach will, be the development of listings of agencies arranged according to ... function.⁸

Scott refers to the *inventory of series* in the plural and the *inventory of agencies* in the singular. In any complex enterprise, the *fonds* comprises one or more *inventories of series* (linking series to formation) plus an *inventory of agencies* (linking provenance to ambience – listing *sous-fonds* within a *fonds d'archives*). By speaking of a single listing for the whole of the Australian Government, which he seems to regard as a single *fonds*, Peter is addressing one of the confusions in the established concept. Departments or ministries are routinely given as examples of *fonds*, *fonds d'archives*, Archive Groups, and/or Record Groups. But they can be viewed, from the ambient perspective, as *sous-fonds* of an 'organisation' (the government or enterprise of which they are part). Each *inventory of series* is a *sous-fonds* in Scott's system. He envisaged two kinds – one based on internal organisational structure (formation) and another upon function. He anticipated that it would be *inventories of agencies* not *inventories of series* that would be interwoven with functional analysis – that functions would form the basis for a second view of the *fonds* not a second view of its contents.

The ICA Rules contemplate the necessity of relating authority records to each other but give no guidance on how they should be related to records (or, rather, when they should not) nor how such relationships (however used) must be:

- Managed in order to preserve the unity and integrity of the *fonds* at the ambient level, or
- Applied in order to display the internal structure of the *fonds*, at the level of description covered by *ISAD*.

It is clear, however, that assumptions about both are embedded in our descriptive tradition. The consequences are significant when one remembers that the deconstruction of function requires that descriptive rules are scaleable⁹ – a *fonds* may exist at any level within a recordkeeping or business process. In *ISAAR2*, the relationships area (5.3) deals only with '... relationships with other corporate bodies, persons and families ...'. That is, ICA deals with relationships that might form the basis for an *inventory of agencies* but not the equally important set of relationships that might form the basis for an *inventory of series* or for description at the *series* or *item* level. Four categories of relationship (hierarchical, temporal, family, and associative) are nominated but exemplars of these

categories are given only by example – no rule is stated. Furthermore, no principle is laid down for their use – anything can be related to anything. Since extended context is a form of provenance for any unit of description that is linked, directly or vicariously, to a provenance entity, this is an invitation to make anything you please part of the provenance and to confuse any association that takes your fancy with those that form the basis of a true *fonds*.

Creator is defined by ICA as:

The corporate body, family or person that created, accumulated and/or maintained records in the conduct of personal or corporate activity. Not to be confused with collector.

A corresponding definition is given for provenance:

The relationship between records and the organizations or individuals that created, accumulated and/or maintained and used them in the conduct of personal or corporate activity.

The slight variation is intriguing. Does it mean that ‘collector’ (a user of records) is part of provenance though not a creator? Does that mean a searchroom reader (also a user of records) is part of the provenance too? What is to be made of the omission of families that ‘created’ records from the definition of provenance?

Provenance must be documented by way of relationships with records that have their own character not by adopting the character of the related entity. A ‘creator’, however defined, has meaning beyond its function as a creator of records. Although the list of possibilities appears to be circumscribed (organisations, corporate bodies, persons, and possibly families) and somewhat circular, it is clear that many entities which may be so identified could be related in the ways nominated by ICA (create, accumulate, maintain, use). It is not clear how ICA intends these ways to be understood (defined) so the door is open to many varying and diverse linkages between ‘creating’ entities and records. The key to having a focused, rather than a prolific, outcome is the definition provided for these kinds of relationship or, in the alternative, a definition of the entities which excludes any other kind of organisation, body, or

person besides the records-creator and, what is probably true of some archival practice, any other kind of activity beyond that of creating records – a manifestly absurd way of thinking about creation entities. Indeed, the value and purpose of attributing provenance – beyond establishing the identity of the *fonds* – is to incorporate meaningful data about context into the description of the records.

What does ‘create’ mean? When can such a relationship type be employed? More importantly when can it not? What relationships with authority records of the kind enumerated are excluded under ISAAR2 rule 3.2.1 (creation) and ISAAR2 3.2.4 (source of acquisition)? How are relationships of any other kind provided for? What kinds of relationships are possible between units of description and authority records that are of a type not enumerated in the definitions of creation and provenance?

Simply, who can create records and who cannot and what kind of creative actions can be undertaken by them? With what kind of entity is a recordkeeping relationship of *creation* possible (directly or vicariously)? How can we define them? How can we know what sort of entity, though in every other respect identical to those which create records, are themselves rendered incapable of doing so? Beyond that, what kinds of relationship can we document between them? We cannot responsibly narrate just any tale about records creation. There has to be some plausibility, some objectively verifiable connection that establishes a link between the contextual entity and the process of creation – an instance of what Terry Cook has called (in relation to appraisal):

... the contextual narrativity found within the records-creation process ... emphasiz[ing] the dialogue and interaction of citizens and groups with the state as much as the state’s own policies and procedures ... search[ing] for multiple narratives and hot spots of contested discourse between citizen and state, rather than accepting the official policy line ... in short, consciously attempt[ing] to document both the functionality of government and its individual programmes that are themselves the creation of citizens in a democracy *and* to document the level of interaction of citizens with the functioning of the state: how they accept, reject, protest, appeal, change, modify, and otherwise influence those functional state programmes, and are in turn influenced by them.¹⁰

The verifiable connection with the creative process, it should by now be clear, is participation in the act or circumstance by virtue of which a document becomes a record, not merely the management of the *fonds*. In many cases, such participation will involve more than one party of formation and more than one process. The exclusion of non-participating parties and processes is valid. The exclusion of all participating parties or processes save the one that handles the documents has to be justified by the descriptive archivists who assert such a principle to be the only correct basis for description.

The primacy given to a single formation appears to have come from ideas about the sanctity of the *physical fonds* – the observable outcome of document management. Despite the unfortunate title of his first published article, Scott did not ‘abandon’ the group or the *fonds*. He sought its reconstruction in a virtual form for each successive stage in its formation, recognising the equal claims of two or more participating parties in the acts or circumstances of its creation. This was his way, I suspect, of trying to defend himself, as he thought, from anticipated accusations of archival heresy. In this, his efforts turned out to be futile. Towards the end, however, he began to open his mind publicly to alternatives involving simultaneous formations from alternative viewpoints, ‘pointing to the increasing need for a complementary approach to agencies by function’:¹¹

This will also involve the *classification* of agencies [fonds] by industry/ activity/ function ... of which more will need to be said on a future occasion.¹²

To avoid charges of heterodoxy, he had to identify those separated creations that when aggregated would form a true *fonds* as well as other aggregations that some might say were no *fonds*. Unlike descriptions of an accumulation of records on a shelf, series registrations must correctly identify each *virtual fonds* to which a series belongs before it is attributed to the formative endeavour of the agency in order to validate the attribution. A proper conception of formation is needed to enable the archivist to document the *fonds* in the absence of any of the records actually produced.

How is a records creator to be identified?

The Achilles heel in the Australian approach is this need to identify a *fonds*-producing entity without actually examining the records. Rosemary Collier comes close to exposing this weakness in a recent article re-iterating that the only valid focus for archival description under past and present approaches has been the records themselves.¹³ The *virtual fonds* is a conceptual entity, not a contingent one, or else it is nothing, but (at the outset at least) Scott was anxious to demonstrate how his methods conformed to traditional approaches and merely broadened them, without violating the essential principles upon which they were based. The separation of the *virtual fonds* from an examination of the recordkeeping circumstances is a shaky proposition, however, in both theory and in practice. It is solvable, I think, by taking a more sophisticated and elaborate approach to delineating relationship types between *records-creator* and *records-created*. Scott's solution, however, was to define agency purely in terms of the *sous-fonds* it produces (or is likely to produce) – an entity with 'an independent recordkeeping system'.

Peter Scott (1966):

An agency is a part of an organisation that has its own independent recordkeeping system.

This is Scott's synonym for *sous-fonds*. Produce a *sous-fonds* and you can 'create' records series. Otherwise, you can't – no matter how much this seems to contradict any other circumstances of the formation. It follows by definitional logic that the total emanation of every agency is a *sous-fonds* bounded into a *fonds d'archives* by relationships the agency has with organisations and other ambient entities.

Compare Peter's 1966 definition with subsequent developments:

National Archives of Australia: CRS Manual¹⁴ (1999):

In the Archives' control system an agency is a distinct and recognisable body which has responsibility for carrying out administrative functions. An agency will usually have:

- an identifiable head with decision-making authority at its hierarchical level;

- a legal instrument or some form of delegated authority which establishes its basis for existence and sets out its functions; and
- its own recordkeeping system.

This is a broader definition than previously used by the Archives. The previous definition emphasised the existence of an independent general recordkeeping system. An agency can be part of the executive, legislature, or judiciary.

Under this definition, both the original defining characteristics have been eliminated – now, they are only features that agencies ‘will usually have’ or things that ‘can be’.

This change is undesirable until a more sophisticated archival concept of *creation* is uncovered. When you separate, by means of a relationship, the creator from the thing created, the archival meaning of *creation* should be located not in the identity of the creator but in the nature of the relationship. Descriptive practice has taken an unproblematic view of creation based on observation of the material being described. Conceptually, the Australian approach must put it *a priori* into the relationship-type, not into the description of either entity. Initially, Peter Scott didn’t do that. Instead, he made his definition circular. By the end, he had started to unravel the meaning of *creation* with forays into simultaneous multiple provenance. We still have to cling to the Scott formulation because no other way has yet emerged whereby *records-creation* can be properly documented. The alternative – developing more sophisticated ideas about *creation* and building them into a multiplicity of relationship types – has not yet been accomplished. When that development has occurred, but not until then, we can move on from Scott’s original idea of *agency*.

ISAD(G) 2:

Creator. The corporate body, family or person that created, accumulated and/or maintained records in the conduct of personal or corporate activity. Not to be confused with collector. (NB ‘collector’ is not defined.)

This last definition is so broad that even ICA found it necessary to explain that it does not include *collector* – even though the act of collection is a perfectly legitimate notion within the concept of provenance. Scott

defined the *creation* of records (viz. maintenance of an independent recordkeeping system – his proposed definition of *sous-fonds*) so that separation of a description of creator from a description of records would not prevent him from assembling a *fonds* (as he defined it) by listing all of the series created by an agency, itself forming part of a *fonds*. This will not be the result of using either the ICA's definition or that now propounded in the *CRS Manual*.

ICA's definition covers a multitude of actions at a multitude of levels – all of which have to be dealt with in any adequate approach to provenance. In one sense, this is quite satisfactory. Any act of *creating, accumulating and/or maintaining* records – be it discrete documents or entire series or *fonds* – qualifies. But by unbinding the creator in the way approved of by the Australian system and then allowing separate identification of the unit of description and of the creator in a manner that is fatal to its correct application, ICA has lost the baby of *respect des fonds* along with the unwanted bath water of a description of context bound up with a description of records.

Peter Scott's original definition survived to at least 1990 (long after Peter had separated from the National Archives and had ceased to have input into the development of his system there):

National Archives of Australia: *CRS Manual* (c. 1990)

[‘Agency’ is an] administrative unit which has a recognisable identity, generates records and has its own independent general record/keeping system. An agency can be part of the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary and may be an authority, board, committee, court, military unit or part of a department.

In his original conceptualisation, Peter Scott understood better than anyone else so far the need to work with a definition of creation that embodies some notion of the traditional *fonds* and his 1966 definition is better at grappling with that requirement than either of those which followed. If we can find a more sophisticated notion of *records creation* than the one that is embodied in the notion of the *fonds*, the changes we introduce into descriptive practice need not involve the loss of *respect des fonds* as it has been understood – so long as a ‘true’ *fonds* results from at least one definition of *create* in the form of either a single or multiple views and other definitions reflect a legitimate view of *formation*.

The argument Peter expected, I suspect, was over his definition of the *virtual fonds* in contradistinction to the *physical fonds*. I think the challenge he expected was: 'Peter, your *virtual fonds* is not a *true fonds*' – not in the sense that some critics argued, that it was artificial, but in the sense that it did not conform to the defining characteristics of *true fonds* because it did not have a physical presence. Convinced that all other writers on the *fonds*/group were conceptually at sea, I think he was waiting for the moment (after they had committed themselves to a conceptual nonsense) when he could expose their confusion.¹⁵ The opportunity never came. He was ready to defend his concept in comparison with anyone else's idea of a *fonds*. But the argument I think he wanted was a definition-by-definition comparison (a conceptual argument) and he never got it. Now fifty years later, it remains a debate that has yet to take place.

If Kitty Packenham's letters are filed into her husband's bureau (regardless of whether they are intersorted, kept separate or as a discrete sub-unit) they are a physical series created by the Duke, not by his wife. They are Kitty's letters, but they are part of the Duke's *fonds*. This does not go far enough either in theory or in application. The question boils down to the problem posed by the title to one of Sue McKemmish's articles – are records ever actual?¹⁶ If the tie between the *fonds* and an actual physical manifestation of the operation of a documentary process is broken, then the answer must be 'no'. I want to be able to describe Kitty's correspondence as the 'creation' of two processes – Kitty's when corresponding and the Duke's when filing. Maybe three – Kitty's when writing, Kitty's when deciding what letters to keep (her own and her correspondents), and the Duke's when filing. Maybe four ... and so on. All this can be dealt with, I think, without violating archival theory and with little difficulty, by means based on Australian methods, enhanced and developed along roads that Peter himself scouted.

Peter Scott was unhappy with the way that (in order to remain true to an archival theory he had inherited) he had to apply his own ideas within that theory's limitations – which he well recognised. He started experimenting with the application of simultaneous multiple provenance to ministerial papers. Private, electorate, and party records were attributed to a person, but we speculated about forming electorate correspondence into series for the electorate as well as the incumbent member. He was uncomfortable that files dealing with departmental

matters in a Minister's office had to be attributed either to the Department (the 'CRS A...' series) or to the Person who was temporarily the holder of ministerial office (the 'CRS M...' series). He must have been aware that by including political and personal papers into an ambience that was essentially governmental he was already ignoring another larger ambience of which such papers are necessarily part. By the time Peter and I parted company he had not yet thought through this problem to what I now regard as its logical conclusion – parallel provenance. I like to think that, given time, he would have. Maybe he did.

His interim solution was the first implementation of simultaneous multiple provenance. Experimentally, we began attributing certain series to both the 'official' provenance and to the personal in the same timeframe. We discussed the possibility of registering ministerial offices as sub-elements within either Parliament, Cabinet, or (less plausibly) departments. Thus five *sous-fonds* were, in effect, identified conceptually (if not in implementation) as subsisting in one set of circumstances – personal, political, parliamentary, ministerial and departmental – to any combination of which a series created in the same timeframe could belong and be related to other series different in each case depending on the ambience. Had Peter Scott broken through the next conceptual barrier and started experimentally registering political parties and electorates without the necessary ambient superstructure, he would also have inaugurated parallel provenance, but so far as I know he never did.

What does records creation mean?

Hilary Jenkinson, Rosemary Collier argues, believed that the Archive Group should be based on recordkeeping structure, not on administrative structure. But Jenkinson defined the Archive Group in terms of the descriptive features of an administration not the descriptive features of a recordkeeping structure – organic whole, complete, independent, etc – nor the descriptive features of a recordkeeping process (or the business process from which it derives).

Peter Scott indulged no such confusion of thought (although he too was beguiled by the quest for distinctive features that an agency should have – perhaps unhappy with the circular nature of the definition of a *fonds*). Despite the subsequent dumbing-down of his approach within many

applications of it, the true locus of the *fonds* remains the agency, not the records – or rather it is to be found in the *records-creating relationship* between the agency and the records. As Rosemary Collier has noted, notions of provenance are developed in ‘a curious circular fashion’. In Peter’s case, the approach is perfectly circular and, therefore, as I have pointed out elsewhere, definitionally useless:

Q. Who created these records?

A. The creator of these records created these records.

Q. Who is the creator of these records?

A. The agency that created these records is the creator of these records.

Therefore, if it’s a recordkeeper it’s an agency, if it ain’t it isn’t.

The only part of Jenkinson’s thinking that Scott abandons (apart from its confusions) is the physical arrangement that requires Jenkinson to fret about which Group to put stray records in. An unconcerned Scott puts them in both (or as many as they belong to) and describes each *fonds* as a list of agencies with inventories of series attached – an output report from the system rather than a depiction or data input format describing what sits together on the shelf as a result of arrangement. When the emphasis shifts from describing the *creator* correctly to getting the relationship with the records right, the chances are that records-creating relationships will exist simultaneously with more than one entity when the entities have been fashioned and documented without regard to the records they have *created*. No harm will be done provided we have carefully articulated what *creation* means when applied as relationships in recordkeeping. The problem is that, apart from vague assumptions about document management, we haven’t.

When or if we identify the variety of ways in which it is possible for an entity to ‘create, accumulate, or maintain’ records, we begin to enumerate and illuminate the kinds of parallel provenance that are possible. Even if we derive our understanding from archives that actually exist, what we derive should be the characteristics of relationships (not the attributes of authority records) that we need to properly document the recordkeeping experience. I have alluded elsewhere to examples of different ways of being a ‘creator’.¹⁷ Family and estate papers abound with examples. In an imagined treatment of

the Papers of the Duke Wellington, I once identified at least thirteen *personas* which the Duke, in his capacity as a generator of documents, and leaving aside any marital complications, embodied as a provenance entity – each worthy of separate documentation:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. Member of Wellesley Family | 8. Member of Parliament |
| 2. British Agent in Indian states | 9. Chief Secretary for Ireland |
| 3. Allied CIC in Iberia | 10. Ambassador to France |
| 4. Plenipotentiary to Congress of Vienna | 11. Prime Minister |
| 5. Warden of Cinque Ports | 12. Foreign Secretary |
| 6. Minister without Portfolio | 13. Himself |
| 7. CIC Netherlands & Army of Occupation | |

In each of these various *roles*, the Duke can be involved in ‘creating, accumulating and/or maintaining’ different sets of documents (including many documents that belong to more than one set) in a variety of different ways: eg as *author* of his own letters, as *minister responsible* for the Foreign Office correspondence, as *participant* in Wellesley family affairs, as *representative* of a government when ambassador or plenipotentiary. Each of these kinds of statements is capable of being represented as a different kind of ‘creation’. This example merely illustrates that there is much ambiguity and confusion to be sorted out within the archival idea of provenance. The examples multiply if we allow that the idea may also be inadequate as well as confused and fail to represent alternative (but legitimate) ideas about what is involved in ‘creation’ beyond those enumerated by ICA (*viz.* create, accumulate, or maintain).

Archival theory became fixated on the indivisibility of the formative source. The idea of provenance derives from a degenerate and curious notion that a *fonds* is the emanation from a single and indivisible office or agency, co-extensive with the embodiment of a function. A parallel provenance – contextualising the papers of the Duke of Wellington by showing his ‘two bodies’ and relating them to the man as well as his office(s) and functions – is rejected. Functions, though routinely identified as important, are not made the basis of a distinct entity for the purpose of conferring provenance. Understanding the context of Wellington’s papers involves identifying the different narratives in which he participated:

- The Duke's own life story.
- His family's history.
- The story of his estate(s) and businesses.
- The record of the offices he held (soldier, diplomat, statesman) in succession to, and as predecessor of, other incumbents.
- The account of the functions or activities (separately documented) which he undertook.
- The life history of the wife whose correspondence was incorporated into his.
- And so on ...

This view brings the object of description (the Duke of Wellington's papers) into alternative ways of looking at them – different narrative streams which explicate the events and circumstances with which they are connected. If these different points of view are themselves contextualised into the same ambience, it will be an example of simultaneous multiple provenance. Otherwise, it is an example of parallel provenance.

The reader will see that I am at pains here (as I have been throughout the composition of most of my earlier writings itemised in 'Part 1') to limit myself by illustrating complexity and ambiguity about the identity and context of the document manager. This leaves aside the more controversial question of whether or not other kinds of participation – beyond document management – form an allowable basis for identifying creation or provenance. My purpose is twofold. First to illustrate that some kind of parallel provenance is to be found even within established descriptive limits.¹⁸ That accepted, it becomes possible to have a sensible discussion about whether those limits are themselves too confining.

The dead hand of original order

The insistence on a single point of view derives from the archivist's approach to the custodianship of physical entities. By an unfounded leap of logic, the principle of original order imposes a dead hand on description because we believe that when only one arrangement is

possible it follows that only one view is possible descriptively. This is intuitive but it is not logical. When I first started writing about documentation, thirty years ago, we spoke comfortably about 'arrangement and description'. Somehow, over that period, arrangement has become lost and A&D reduced to archival description merely. How did that happen? ICA has a definition of arrangement:

Arrangement. The intellectual and physical processes and results of analyzing and organizing documents in accordance with archival principles. *ISAD(G) v.2* (Ottawa, 2000).

Juxtaposed with the definition of archival description, what this means (if anything) is that the process of archival arrangement and the process of archival description are two different things and one has a dependency on the other. Documents are 'analysed' and 'organised' and *then* described according to the single view imposed on the records by the organisation we have given them. Yet the meaning of the more venerable concept (A&D) implied a more symbiotic approach:

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.¹⁹

I made my own modest contribution to the articulation of that nexus in the very first article I ever had published (a defence of original order):

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 records through rearrangement ... 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 ...

the only really satisfactory solution (short of giving, in effect, full series descriptions to each document) is to have series in their original order and attribute them simultaneously to all persons and enterprises of whose transactions they formed a part.²⁰

Of course, this was written thirty years ago and I then thought that the identification of an unobscured provenance for materials organised at the series level was unproblematic. The implications of what I then wrote are that, while the processes of arrangement and those of description are interdependent, choices made about arrangement can be ameliorated through the use of multiple provenance. I would now say the same about parallel provenance. Under ICA's definitions, a degree of interdependency is also implied but it is linear rather than symbiotic. Documents are:

- First, analysed and organised according to archival principles.
- Then, a representation is captured and recorded.
- Finally, the representations are analysed and organised according to descriptive principles.

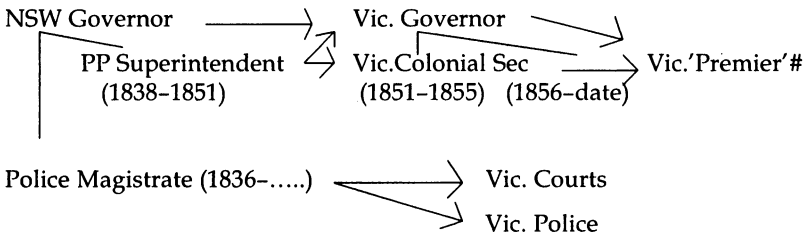
This suggests that arrangement (the analysis and organisation of documents) produces a (re)construction in accordance with archival principles so that, provided the descriptive representation of the resulting arrangement is 'accurate', those same principles will necessarily be satisfied by the description itself. There is no suggestion, however, that arrangement is any way dependent upon description (documentation) and nothing more convincing than an assumption that description must be limited by arrangement and an assertion (by inference) that archival principles preclude more than a single view from being taken.

The eye of the beholder

Parallel provenance describes the imperfect state of an archival description which is itself imperfectly contextualised. Parallel provenance is like head lice - having it means you know there is a problem. Your descriptive system is inadequate to properly contextualising the records you are attempting to portray. So long as

another way of looking at it is possible, then a parallel view of provenance may be taken. This can be eliminated, however, quite simply by recontextualising the description and providing the parallel views with a new, common ambience. Then, under the definitions propounded above the two or more provenance statements occur within a single ambience rather than in different ones. At this point, the description becomes an example of simultaneous multiple provenance instead of parallel provenance.

Consider now the much-simplified outline of the records of Port Phillip given below. The Port Phillip (PP) district was established within the borders of New South Wales in 1836. Urgent first requirements of the new administration included the establishment of a system of policing and justice over the inhabitants (unauthorised settlers and Aborigines) and the establishment of a system for surveying and allocating land. The first Police Magistrate was the senior official present, but he had little superintendence over other officials who reported directly to their parent departments in Sydney.



sometimes Chief Secretary → ownership → succession

Selected functions:

Law

Lands Superintendence

Customs

Head of 'State'

Head of Government

Table 3. The records of Port Phillip (1836-51)

In 1838, a new office of Superintendent was established to formally take over the headship of administration. The powers of this official (a sort of Lieutenant Governor) were circumscribed, however, and some local

officials still reported directly to Sydney (eg in relation to Lands) at least in respect of some matters²¹ although they had to defer to the Superintendent on matters of purely local administration. The Superintendent had no jurisdiction over the military but took over policing and local justice from the Police Magistrate who became a subordinate official.

Until 1855, the NSW Governor was both Head of 'State' (vice-regal)²² and Head of Government. In 1851, a separate Crown Colony of Victoria was established. Upon self-government in 1855, the function of Head of Government was transferred from the respective Governors to the post of Chief Secretary/Premier. This official (previously known as Colonial Secretary) had formerly been the chief executive of the Governor's administration.

The administrative position was, of course, much more complex and convoluted than this. Layers of administrative and constitutional complexity lay between the officials I have identified and the records. The area of courts, police, and military pose especial problems of nuance and difficulty. To simplify the example, the following table sets out the descriptive state of affairs from the point of view of the Public Record Office of Victoria and the NSW State Records Office which is substantially correct (on one view) in relation to units of description relating to the administration of what is now Victoria that are today to be found spread between Sydney and Melbourne.

Context		Records 'of' Victoria		
Provenance	Function	Dates	Units of Description	Dates
NSW Governor	Head of State NSW #	1788-		
NSW Governor	Head of Gov't NSW #	1788-55	Σ Law, Lands, Superintendence	1836-51
Vic. PP Magistrate	Head of Gov't Vic.	1836-38	---: Superintendence Ψ	1836-38
Vic. Superintendent	Head of Gov't Vic.	1838-51	---: Law, Lands, Superintendence Ψ	1838-51
Vic. Governor	Head of State Vic.	1851-	Σ Law, Lands, Superintendence	1851-
Vic. Governor	Head of Gov't Vic.	1851-55	Σ Law, Lands, Superintendence	1851-55
Vic. Col.Secretary	CEO	1851-55	---: Lands Ψ	
Vic. 'Premier'	Head of Gov't Vic.	1855-	Σ Superintendence	1855-
Vic. Attorney-Generall	Minister	1855-	Σ Law	1855-
Vic. Lands Csnr	Minister	1855-	Σ Lands	1855-

includes Port Phillip District Ψ subordinate responsibility Σ primary responsibility

Table 4. The Port Phillip *fonds*

This is to say nothing of the complexities arising from the nineteenth-century practice of creating duplicate records in different places. The purpose of this table is not to illustrate the complexities of contextual analysis, but to demonstrate the application of parallel provenance. All of the States along Australia's eastern seaboard began life as part of New South Wales and the same issues arise for each – New Zealand too. Although all of the records prior to separation are technically part of the archives of New South Wales, almost all of those held locally at the time of separation remained and are still treated today as part of the fabric of the archives of the successor states which those districts or sub-colonies became. It would, of course, be possible for the six government archives authorities to agree on a common ambience – a single documented 'authority record' providing a common ambience²³ for all six – but, in the absence of that, the descriptive task in those five descriptive programs is to make sense of what they have (rather than what their holdings are conceptually part of).²⁴ A properly standardised descriptive process would then enable the different depictions of authority entities whose records are held in two or more places to at least have the same ambience, if not the same provenance.

For this article, I consulted the online catalogues of the Federal and NSW archives authorities. The online site for PRO Victoria is largely

devoid of assistance regarding provenance, so I had to consult the printed *Summary Guide* and *Digest* that was produced in 1990. There is good evidence that NSW is attempting to integrate its view of 'Victorian' records with material being produced by PRO Victoria. My question was: does this create a single provenance or parallel provenance? In other words, are three archival programs capable of producing an identical view of the provenance of the same records? The simple answer (which I will not take the space to demonstrate here) is that they are not. There are three different views of both the ambience and the provenance of records produced in the Port Phillip District between 1836/8 and 1851 in the finding aids of the three repositories in which those records are now to be found.

I am not arguing that this is a problem that needs to be rectified. I have in the past drawn attention to its solution as one amongst many benefits of true standardisation. In 1986, I even prepared a report (to no avail) for the Australian Council of Archives on how it could be accomplished by application of a GEMMS methodology (see Appendix below). My point now is not that a problem exists that must be attended to. My point now is that the state of affairs I have described illustrates the existence of parallel provenance and assaults notions of impartiality and the single view in archival description.

The finding aids in question represent three possible views (or parallel provenance) of the records. The NSW view is clearly the most orthodox. All of the records are part of the archives of NSW: PP Law, PP Lands and PP Customs being merely *sous-fonds* within NSW Law, NSW Lands, and NSW Customs. The National Archives, inheritors of the Victorian pre-1851 customs records, see them as part of its own inheritance from the Colony of NSW, not as part of the fabric of the archives of Victoria, even though it was from the successor Colony of Victoria that the Commonwealth received them upon federation in 1901.

As the inheritor of the local records, the Victorian view is that these are each a *fonds* in its own right, with a technical connection via the Superintendent to Sydney but descriptively part of the fledgling Victorian administration which continued after separation in 1851. Thus, the Victorian *Digest* shows some administrative units as part of a continuous operation – eg VRG 4 Courts (1836–) but others split to reflect the centralisation of administration in Sydney:

Lands Records

- : VRG 27 District Land Offices (1836 -) for operations
- : VRG 18 Lands (1851 - 1983) for departmental control

Even though there is conceptually no material difference between the two. The local coordination of lands was inherited by the Victorian Governor in 1851 and passed onto the embryonic 'Minister' of Lands (Surveyor-General) under representative government in 1855. The head of Lands throughout was the Victorian office of Surveyor-General who passed from being a NSW official, to being an officer of the Governor's administration (1851-1855) and thence to a member of the first 'ministry' under self-government (post-1855). Curiously, when the inefficacy of combining the technical requirements of the office with ministerial responsibility was realised, the office of Surveyor-General was 'degraded' back into the civil service and ministerial power vested in a Commissioner of Lands. The decision to date this *fonds* from 1851 and to show no break in 1855 is purely arbitrary. Thus three different views can be (and are) taken of the same set of facts.

In Summary: What is it that archivists should do?

Let us consider the first requirement of any depiction - what is it that archivists are looking for? How do they know it when they see it? What, in other words, is the *purpose* of archival description? What are finding aids for? Here the ICA standards are worthless. As an act of deliberate policy, the first statement of principles developed to govern the development of international standards was rendered moot by the ICA Ad Hoc Commission (predecessor to the Descriptive Standards Committee) in Stockholm in 1993. Instead of being developed as an agreed basis for the evolution of descriptive standards, it was abandoned as an historical irrelevance having no continuing application to the subsequent evolution of standards. This was a manoeuvre to cut off further discussion of the principles to which serious objections had been raised and not yet dealt with. To be sure, it facilitated moving quickly onto the drafting of two standards about *how* to do it, but has left the international discourse on their further development and evolution about what is being done rudderless and without direction.

Like old fashioned records management texts that knew nothing about the creation of records and dealt merely with their registration, classification, filing, indexing, storage, and retrieval (the 'cabbage patch' school of recordkeeping²⁵), archival descriptive standards are dysfunctional when it comes to answering a key question: what is it that you are looking for? Without knowing what it is that you are looking for, you can't possibly know what it is that you see. If you don't know what it is that you are seeing, how can you explain to another observer what it is?

Archivists who choose to defend the doctrine of the single point of view can only do so with the argument that it is the only possible point of view for the purpose of depicting what you are undertaking to depict. No one, after a moment's reflection, could sanely argue that it is the only possible point of view. The approach cannot even be defended on the grounds that it is the best point of view, since that would acknowledge a multiple view of provenance (albeit presenting less satisfactory views) from amongst which the best must be chosen. That is not allowed. The only viable defence is the proposition that the 'archival' view is the only possible or allowable view for the purpose of an archival description. As soon as archival description is defined in non-circular terms, the debate then has to centre on how defensible ideas of 'creation' are in meeting the purposes of archival description. That, if it ever takes place, will be a very useful debate.

When the world hears the word 'archivist' they think of someone wearing a cardigan and white gloves wheeling great trolley loads of old paper around. This, it is widely believed, is what archivists do. Surgeons take great care to scrub up, but to say that scrubbing up is what surgeons do is ludicrous. It is just as ludicrous to say that what archivists do is handle and write depictions of old paper. Surgeons perform delicate operations with sharp implements inside the human body – that is what they do. Archivists make delicate analyses of structure and context – that is what they do.

What archivists do, what they look for when they set about archival description, is relationships between units of description which tell stories of content and structure. Since a record may be defined, in order to distinguish it from other kinds of information, as documentation linked to event or circumstance, a relationship of some kind must be established with events/circumstances; but this is still not the essence

of archival description. The link between the document and the event/circumstance which gives it evidential value is incidental, not central, to archival description. Any documentation system can do that.

What makes archival description unique (well, almost unique) is that, while the link with event/circumstance is paramount, what we are actually looking for – so that we can accurately represent it – is relationships between events and circumstances *per se*. The linked documents can be viewed in the sequence or sequences (eg a series) which their connection with related events/circumstances gives them. Archival description, however, is *not* primarily the representation of the resulting sequences of documents, but the capture and maintenance of documentation on the relationships between relevant events and circumstances, which enables the linked documents to be viewed in this way and organised into the formations ('units of description') we describe. Ideally, the formations imparted by document management would perfectly correspond to events, but we know that they seldom do that.

Provenance is 'an organization or individual that created, accumulated and/or maintained or used documents in the conduct of personal or corporate activity' – *ISAARI*. Australian archival methods have been separating descriptions of records from descriptions of provenance and documenting relationships between them for fifty years. Traditionally, respect for provenance entails choosing one entity in preference to all others as the creator. Since the 1960s, Australian theory has challenged this principle, by replacing provenance with 'multiple provenance' (recognising that documents assembled as records can pass through the hands of several successive creators over time). Multiple provenance still affords a primacy, however, to one creator at any given time – identifying a multiplicity of creators in succession comes with the passage of time, it is not simultaneous. A theory of simultaneous multiple-provenance (allowing two or more creators to be identified at one and the same time) represents a more fundamental challenge to descriptive thinking that has been toyed with – both in theory and in application.

The ICA definition of provenance, however, itself moves the concept of 'production' beyond creation to include accumulation, maintenance, and use as well as creation. This list of possible provenance-generating actions is not exhaustive but it allows for different ideas about what

provenance comprises to be entertained simultaneously. If accumulating, maintaining, using, and creating are different ways in which documents are 'produced' and any two of these actions can occur simultaneously, then by the ICA's own definitions, simultaneous multiple provenance must be possible. The standards fail, however, to address the question directly: can two or more entities be involved simultaneously in creation, accumulation, etc? Some clarity around these and other ideas is necessary before embarking on an examination of 'parallel provenance', including an exploration of the actions (apart from 'creation' which itself needs to be more closely defined) which give rise to a provenance relationship with records. Could function, for example, replace actor as the primary source of provenance?

However provenance is understood, entities establishing the provenance of records are usually treated as having a single ambience. Ambience is the context of provenance, just as provenance is the context of records. The theoretical discussion of the place of provenance in archival description, however *avant garde*, rests on a shared assumption that multiple provenance entities all reside within a common ambience. Parallel provenance describes a situation where two or more entities are identified as establishing the provenance of records where each resides in a different ambience. Two possibilities exist:

- Two (or more) entities having different ambience are involved in the same kind of action (eg creation).
- Two (or more) such entities are involved in different kinds of action (eg creation and control).

It must be stressed here that I am not propounding that parallel provenance involves two different entities being involved simultaneously in the same kind of creating/producing relationship with the same document(s) – that would be joint creation. Of course, if the simultaneous creators belonged to different ambient environments an element of parallel provenance would be involved.

Archival description must necessarily be grounded in a point of view (an ambience). Often, the ambience is unstated – implicit rather than explicit. Different points of view establish an alternative context. Archival theory can be developed to allow the simultaneous documentation of these alternative (parallel) points of view in a single descriptive system or statement. A system is to be preferred because it

allows for ongoing management of collective knowledge. Postmodernist critics have challenged archival theory to provide for an articulation of different voices in the way records are preserved and described. Parallel provenance provides an acceptable method for meeting this challenge without disturbing respect for provenance.

Parallel provenance also operates at the granular level. All description is scalable. The provenance of a single document or (trans)action can be dealt with using the same methods applicable to a whole series or *fonds*. In the world of cyberspace, networked activity opens up business processes so that shared workspace increases participation by numerous actors in a single workflow regardless of organisational structures (which have hitherto provided the source of ideas about creation and provenance) and decreases communication as a step dissociating one phase of a workflow from another. Electronic records have less well defined boundaries establishing 'creation', 'control', 'maintenance', etc. Ideas about parallel contextual worlds that establish the evidential meaning of such records regardless of organisational boundaries can help illuminate how current recordkeeping can be developed to meet new challenges.

The contextual meaning of recordkeeping entities must not be built into the captured view of them. It follows that contextual meaning must be documented not in entity-description but in the crafting of relationships. If two different entities (not necessarily two different entity types) are involved in 'producing' documents or sets of documents in different ways (ie not as joint creators) then it will be necessary to develop a methodology for depicting the different ways in which contextual and functional entities can relate to units of description – in short, relationship types. In my series of articles entitled 'Relationships in records' I have already postulated a universal entity-type definition (the HERO²⁶). The next step, as yet unrealised in that series, will be to postulate a universal relationship-type (the HERA?²⁷) and a standardised way of formulating relationships. I think it will go something like this:

HERO Type + HERO Code

– : is (HERA Type + HERA Code)

– : of (HERO Type + HERO Code)

– : between/at (date or date + date)

The development of these ideas clearly owes something to both archival politics and to real politics.

And finally: The politics of parallel provenance

Archival politics are involved in the attacks on description from some post-custodialists and their ilk undermining the cherished notion of impartiality. I do not quarrel with their attacks on delusions of impartiality *per se*. It is the challenge to come up with a technical method that will accommodate contested views of provenance that stimulates me. I take it as an insult to my professional ingenuity when I hear suggestions it cannot be done. I say nothing about the validity of the several views that parallel provenance provides for, only that it is technically possible to provide for them. I stress that this approach does not involve substituting alternative views for the *fonds*, only broadening the total view by adding different views to the traditional one.

The real politics are those that support what Terry Cook has (in the passage already quoted) called the 'silenced voices' in appraisal:

Ascribing appraisal 'value' to records would be based on the contextual narrativity found within the records-creation process rather than on anticipated uses of the records' subject content. Appraisal would attend as carefully to the marginalized and even silenced voices as it now does to the powerful voices found in official institutional records. This can be done even when appraising the records of powerful entities like the state (in its various levels of government) or business corporations ... [by deliberately seeking] to give voice to the marginalized, to the 'Other,' to losers as well as winners, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged as well as the powerful and articulate, which is accomplished through new ways of looking at case files and electronic data and then choosing the most succinct record in the best medium for documenting these diverse voices.²⁸

Our archives represent the products of actions (processes) in which others than the traditional 'creators' of records have been involved. The Aborigines of the Stolen Generation and their families and descendants were participants in the process which produced official records of what

was done. Some of them describe those government files as 'our' family histories.²⁹ The provenance, from their point of view, extends beyond the government records-producing process to include those of missions, churches, and welfare agencies as well. Their 'archive' contains many documents that are legitimately seen also as part of the archive of the various government and private enterprises involved. In the world of 2005, it is unlikely, I think, that these parallel views have yet been adequately contextualised into a single ambience. Until that is done, they must be treated using the methods of parallel provenance.

For some, all this may seem ridiculously theoretical. Let me illustrate how and why it is not. In a recent issue of *Archives and Manuscripts*, Ross Gibbs enthused that a report proposing a digital Archival Gateway in the UK was 'inspiring and timely'.³⁰ Inspiring, presumably, because its recommendations fit in with the reviewer's own ideas and timely because he, along with other government archivists, is promoting a similar proposal here in Australia - the National Online Archival Network (NOAN). Consider how the idea of parallel provenance politicises (in every possible meaning of the word) that proposal.

As Gibbs acknowledges, such gateways require additional allocation of public funds. If extra public money is to be applied, who is to control its use and disposition? The government archivists perhaps - because they developed it. But should government archivists, with their hopelessly fractured and partial view of the archives of the nation, be allowed to spend taxpayers' money supporting such a view? Should special interest groups be given the task instead? But we have seen how the politics of cultural institutions have bedevilled the management of museums, galleries, and archives at the national and local levels. In those politics, there are no parallel views - just winners and losers. What view should the ASA take in formulating a submission to government? Should they argue for the establishment of somebody apart from the government archives - not only separate but out of their reach - that should be given carriage and management of such a project?

Nor is this something that can be dealt with by the familiar 'consultation' mechanisms established by the government archives to deal with community unrest. Those who are consulted become mere clients of those who do the consulting. The power in such a relationship comes from the fact that the archives programs are funded to think about the issues all the time and to develop a consistent and well-thought through

perspective (provenance). The power comes also from the way matters for consideration are presented – from the provenance of the governor not the governed. It comes about that, as a result of all that concentration of effort (and power), the very agenda, the questions upon which consultation is sought, are developed by the archives programs and do not admit of fruitful answers outside their imposed frame of reference. Similar experiences arise in the failed attempts to get ‘users’³¹ to comment on disposal before decisions are implemented but *after* they have been formulated. Such ‘consultations’ cannot function well, as Terry Cook reminds us, so long as they are articulated solely within the world-view of the ‘creator’ of the records.

A contested answer can only ever be formulated within a contested view of the issues. A government archivist’s view of disposal can be judged only in one of two ways – by someone who audits the archivist’s compliance with agreed and testable policies and procedures or by someone who evaluates the archivist’s judgement by contextualising the records differently and comparing the two results. But parallel provenance is never going to be an answer to any question set by a government archives. It may be the correct response, however, to a national need. A program committed to:

- documenting the whole ambience of Australian society, not merely the detritus left behind by governmental functionaries as portrayed for us by government archives programs, and
- then offering the resulting description as a gateway which government (and other) archives programs plugged into but did not shape or control.

Such a setup would display in all its richness and power the records of the whole nation, not just official records or collected records. Moreover, within such a setup, the relative meaning and importance of official and collected records would be perceived in a different light and assigned a different value. Parallel provenance is neither a partial, nor a compromised, nor a winner’s view. It recognises wholeness, contestation and ambiguity.

Different perspectives on the past – contrasting, conflicting even, but nevertheless authentic – would provide (or, at least, attempt to provide) the whole contextual meaning, as well as enriched discovery pathways,

of the records thus displayed. Should the ASA argue that NOAN be developed not as a tool of the government archivists but as a national resource – to represent a national not a governmental view of the past? Should that view be founded on the existing partial provenance represented by finding aids in government archives authorities and of any other institutions whose ‘holdings’ might be included or upon a more satisfactory holdings-free view based on a sound understanding of parallel provenance? We cannot expect that questions like these will be discussed calmly (if at all).

Endnotes

1 Chamberlin, J Edward *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*, Canada, Alfred A Knopf, 2003, p. 151.

2 Of course, the additional information contained in Proposition Two could and probably would be included as added description under Proposition One. This is why I assert that a unifying principle is possible. The example is concerned with the attribution of provenance and the identity of the entity being described, not with the corrective power of the ‘note’.

3 When deriding the ICA rules to an overseas audience, I am repeatedly told that the methods I advocate are what many of my auditors employ. When I tackle them about it and say that this conflicts with ICA rules, they respond that they simply discard so much of the ICA rules as would interfere with their doing it the right way. I do not, therefore, mean to imply that international practice is faulty, simply that international theory cannot account for it. I am astonished, however, that others do not see this as a problem.

4 Chamberlin, J Edward op.cit., pp. 228-29.

5 If the ICA rules are to work (indeed, if any descriptive enterprise it to function), many non-personal institutions must be thus treated that re not going to be corporations in the legal sense.

6 When his name was omitted from the Court Circular following a private production of The Gondoliers for Queen Victoria at Windsor, Gilbert famously retorted: ‘I suppose I shouldn’t be upset about not being given credit for The Gondoliers; I might have been given credit for Ivanhoe!’

7 PJ Scott and G Finlay, ‘Archives and Administrative Change – Some Methods and Approaches (‘Part 1’)’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol.7, no.3, August 1978, p. 115.

8 *ibid.* pp. 122-123. When we introduced Inventories of Agencies to the Public Record Office of Victoria we named them Record Groups – partly as a joke and partly to make the point.

9 The rules of description can be applied to any entity regardless of its place within the network of relationships established by a single point of view. It follows that the meaning of an entity derives from the relationships established with other entities, not just the attributes assigned to it. This meaning can be altered by adding to the network of relationships. In this fashion, any entity can assume any entity-role and, within certain limitations, take over the function of any entity-type. In plain terms: a file can be anything from an 'item' to a fonds or a recordkeeping system in its own right – depending on how it is described (or viewed).

10 Terry Cook, 'Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth: postmodernism and the practice of archives' *Archivaria* 51, Spring 2001, pp. 30-31.

11 PJ Scott, CD Smith and G Finlay, 'Archives and Administrative Change – Some Methods and Approaches (Part 2)', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol.7, no.4, April 1979, p. 151.

12 *ibid.* p. 163.

13 Rosemary Collier, 'The return of the groupie, or the fonds farewell? Thoughts on the Archive or Record Group concept' *New Zealand Archivist*, Summer, 2004, pp. 14-19. I say that Rosemary's emphasis on examination of records as the basis for description is correct in my view. Yet my chosen and preferred method belies this. The cause of this intellectual conflict lies, I believe, in our primitive approach to documenting recordkeeping (and business) processes – a flaw long ago identified for us by David Bearman – and its resolution I believe lies in getting better at analysis and documentation of both functions.

14 Downloaded from National Archives of Australia website (*CRS Manual*) on 20 February 2005 at <<http://naa12.naa.gov.au/manual/index.htm>>. The *CRS Manual* is, of course, an implementation not a conceptualisation. The *CRS Manual* goes on to define two kinds of relationships between agencies and series (creation and control) and a third kind of relationship between agencies and 'records' (transfer). None of these relationships embody *respect des fonds*. 'Records' are not a unit of description within the Australian system.

15 It remains true to this day that advocates of the monocular view insist that there is no confusion. In each and every case, that might even be true – though I doubt it. The confusion to which I refer is a conceptual one. Each and every descriptive archivist may indeed be able to state a view of provenance and apply it consistently to records that they observe. But they will not be able to articulate an agreed conception and apply it to produce consistent results amongst themselves by reference solely to their agreed conception. See below.

16 Sue McKemmish, 'Are Records Ever Actual?' in *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* edited by Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, Melbourne, Ancora Press, 1994, pp. 187-203.

17 Chris Hurley, 'Problems with provenance ...' *op.cit.*

18 The divide between manuscript librarians and other archivists illustrates well the nature of parallel provenance. In the 1970s, I was compelled under instruction to physically 'split' a series of papers belonging to the Prime Minister's Press Secretary into two portions to be housed in the National Library of Australia and in what is now the National Archives. This resulted from the bitterness and pig-headed obstinacy both institutions displayed in their battle over the acquisition of personal papers. My task was to sift out files (and sometimes documents from within files) belonging to the period in office of one of the four Prime Ministers this Press Secretary had served. From the point of view of the Library, I was identifying a missing portion of the personal papers of that PM to be housed with other papers from the same man at the Library. From the point of view of the Archives, I was dismembering a series belonging to the Prime Minister's Office throughout four successive incumbencies. Each custodian had a different story to tell and no way of telling it except by doing violence to the records.

19 JH Hodson, *The Administration of Archives*, Oxford, 1972, p.124.

20 Chris Hurley, 'Personal Papers and the Treatment of Archival Principles' *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol.6, no.8, February, 1977, pp. 361-362.

21 The point is disputed in the NSW finding aids which have the local commissioners subordinate to the Superintendent. The dispute (in itself insignificant) appears to be based on material supplied to NSW from Victoria which is certainly at variance with what I can recall was our conclusion on the responsibilities for lands. An interesting illustration of how parallel provenance can arise from a difference of opinion as to facts, not just a different perspective on undisputed realities.

22 The early governors of New South Wales can hardly be said to be vice-regal. They were, if anything, officials of the Colonial Office. Governors began to undertake what we now understand to be vice-regal functions with representative government in the 1850s.

23 As well as the former colonies of New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria, New Zealand (briefly), and Queensland, the Commonwealth of Australia (formed upon federation in 1901) is involved. Unlike the process that occurred upon separation from NSW ('let's leave the records where they are'), upon federation many Victorian records were handed over to the newly formed Commonwealth ('let's take them with us'). Thus some 'Victorian' records from the pre-separation period now may be found in Canberra.

24 When I was head of the Public Record Office in Victoria in the 1980s, I did propose such a venture to my Sydney and Canberra colleagues but it evinced no interest.

25 Young records manager: 'Please, mummy, where do records come from?' Mummy: 'Well, dear, every morning, mummy and daddy go out into the

garden and find them under cabbage leaves; then we register, classify, index, etc, etc'. The archival equivalent is the answer to the question: what are we describing? 'Well, dear, every morning mummy and daddy go out into the garden and find units of description under cabbage leaves ...'.

26 Hurley's Enduring Recordkeeping Object (the HERO) is explained in Part 7 of 'Relationships in Records' op.cit.

27 Hurley's Enduring Recordkeeping Association (the HERA).

28 Terry Cook, 'Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth: postmodernism and the practice of archives' *Archivaria* 51, Spring 2001, pp. 30-31.

29 In Australia, Aborigines are sometimes referred to as traditional owners of the land while Europeans settlers are called the new owners. In the case of records, roles might be reversed, with European governments assuming the role of traditional owners of records and, under parallel provenance, Aborigines and others of silenced voice becoming their 'new' owners.

30 Ross Gibbs, review of 'Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future: Report of the Archives Task Force [of] Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [of the United Kingdom]', *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 32, no. 2, November 2004, pp. 192-194.

31 Someone has wittily remarked that the only two professions that refer to 'users' are IT and drug trafficking, but I think archives management is a third.

APPENDIX: GEMMS

I have refrained here from exploring one method by which parallel provenance can be recontextualised into a single ambience and I have already used up too much space. That is another discussion, requiring assent to the notion of parallel provenance before it can be sensibly undertaken. For the purpose of bringing this discussion to a point of rest, let me quote at some length from another piece of mine in which I outline a tentative solution: the General-purpose Extensible Metadata Management Schema (GEMMS). Simply put, this would be a methodology or schema whereby provenance entities could be related (using the scalability principle) into a single ambient view without losing their connections with the host ambience in which they are originally depicted. It would involve giving a single entity two (or more) parallel identities linked to a multiplicity of ambient meanings.

Chris Hurley, 'Relationships in Records ... : a Retrospective' *New Zealand Archivist*, Summer 2004, pp. 9-13:

7.08 When we explore the intricacies of recordkeeping, we are exploring the deliberate intent the recordkeeper to capture, manage and preserve evidence – from the point of view of the creator of the system, usually the creator of the records. This is what we have been taught to do. But if contextual knowledge means more than that metadata which is inscribed on the record by the creator, we may have to consider the status of metadata embodying contextual knowledge from other points of view. A's deliberate records may be the accidental records of B.

7.09 The same materials may have evidential value independent of the creator's intent (or at least not co-extensive with it). The intervention of the traditional archivist documents metadata essential to the support of evidential meaning not hitherto captured, but usually this is only from a single point of view, by capturing (or, more correctly, recapturing) contextual knowledge pertaining to one view of creation...

7.12 Nothing prevents us from documenting relationships from alternative points of view [about the creation] to that of the creator – not at the expense of those from the creator's point of view, but in addition. This is the essence of parallel provenance ... Acceptance of the notion of parallel provenance opens a door into a new world of relationships hitherto not dealt with in the traditional way – viz. relationships divined from other points of view....

7.17 This is ... GEMMS – which is a perspective encompassing different views of the same context and structure into a single, comprehensive, and broader view. It is not about making up different alternative views of the same records, but of recognising that other views of the materials we handle are possible (and true) and seeking to use our traditional tools to document them. Parallel provenance exists with or without GEMMS, but it remains undocumented by us. To implement GEMMS, we will need to reconceptualise

what we mean by relationships in records and develop a new set of implementation rules, but our most pressing need will for an obelisk. The relevance of this to the cultural mission of archivists should be apparent. At a more granular level its relevance to electronic recordkeeping in shared workspace is just as important.

7.26 When archives programmes give up (or are forced to give up) their partial views of the data they manage and submit to a more inclusive (and accurate) documentation of contextual frameworks than they are singly capable of dealing with, perhaps it can also include the Aboriginal view of the Protectorate records.