International Scene

MARJORIE RABE BARRITT and NANCY BARTLETT, editors

The British Move Toward Standards Of Archival Description: The *MAD* Standard

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Abstract: British progress in developing standards of archival description has been embodied since 1984 in an Archival Description Project, based at the University of Liverpool. In contrast to the United States and Canada, where work on archival descriptive standards has focused on bibliographic exchange, the British archivists have concentrated on developing standards for the system of finding aids within a repository. The author discusses the recently-published *Manual of Archival Description*, 2nd ed. (*MAD2*), including its levels, table of data elements, modes, and model finding aids. He also discusses the development of a draft UK MARC format for Archival and Manuscripts Control (AMC) and the potential for MARC-based data exchange projects in Britain.

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Editor's note: We are pleased to be able to present this article in the same issue with the background papers for the Working Group on Archival Description. It should be clear, however, that those papers and the Working Group's report were not available to Mr. Cook at the time that he prepared this article.

DURING THE 1980s a movement toward establishing codified standards of archival description became evident in several parts of the world. Perhaps the most internationally publicized work was that done in North America, at first by the various task forces set up by the Society of American Archivists, and later by the work of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists and its working parties.[1] However, the same tendency showed itself in other parts of the world beyond Anglophone countries.[2]

In October 1988 the National Archives of Canada, in association with the International Council on Archives (ICA), held an international invitational meeting of experts on descriptive standards. Contributions to this meeting came from Great Britain, Canada, China, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the ICA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Senegal, Sweden, and the United States.[3] It was the first occasion for some direct comparison of the work done in the United States, Canada, and Britain. At that time, the Canadians had reached the stage of circulating a draft standard for writing archival descriptions at the level of the group or collection (which they had decided to term *fonds*). The British standard already had a somewhat complex publication history, details of which are given later in this article.

Comparison made obvious a fundamental difference of aim between the United States and Canadian standards on the one hand, and the British standard on the other. The British have intended the *Manual of Archival Description*, second edition (*MAD2*) as a norm for the production of finding aids systems, that is, for the production of the various kinds of finding aids to use inside the repository.[4]

This aim is different from that of the standards already familiar in North America. These standards govern the form of archival descriptions which are entries in bibliographic databases, or which are otherwise the subject of data exchange schemes. It is right to refer to these as bibliographic descriptions, although of archival materials. Such descriptions are of course additional to, or exterior to, the normal finding aid systems of repositories, which are (initially at least) aimed at controlling the repository's holdings for their own purposes. Repositories have always wished to make information about their materials available in places outside their own immediate neighborhoods, and so data exchange schemes have come into existence. Data exchange by electronic means, using standard descriptions, is the big new development in archival work in the late twentieth century, and as archivists get more used to the practice, its revolutionary potential will become obvious. Meanwhile, descriptive work con-

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[1]Summarized by David Bearman in *Towards National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories: the National Information Systems Task Force (NSTF) Papers, 1981-1984* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1987). The working parties are still in operation. Reports published so far are *Toward Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1985) and Jean E. Dryden and Kent M. Haworth, *Developing Descriptive Standards, a Call to Action*. This report was prepared by the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, and published as Occasional Paper No. 1 by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists in July 1987.

[2]Michael Cook, "Standards of Archival Description," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 8 (1987): 181-88.

[3]Invitational Meeting of Experts on Descriptive Standards, 4-7 October 1988, *Working Documents and Position Papers* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1988).

[4]Michael Cook and Margaret Procter, *A Manual of Archival Description*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot, England: Gower, 1990). The first edition was published as Michael Cook and K. Grant, *Manual of Archival Description* (London: Society of Archivists, 1986). The society's publications are available from the Hampshire Record Office, 20 Southgate Street, Winchester, SO23 9EF, England.

tinues inside the repository, and for this, *MAD2* standards are appropriate since *MAD2* provides a standard and a structure for in-house finding aid systems.

What then of standards for bibliographic descriptions of archival materials? In North America, the standard for these, used to create an entry in a data exchange system, is provided by works published by the Society of American Archivists. The most important of these standards is Steve Hensen's *Archives, Personal Papers and Manuscripts*, backed by the USMARC Archival and Manuscript Control (AMC) format.[5] Both of these are adaptations of standards originally devised for library use. Since they are familiar to American readers of this journal, it is hardly necessary to describe their contents in detail. On the other hand, *MAD* is not well-known. This article attempts to describe some of *MAD*'s main features, in order to suggest some of the linkages that could be developed between it and the standards of the United States and Canada.

History of the Archival Description Project

The project that has produced the two successive editions of the *Manual of Archival Description* had its origins in voluntary work undertaken in the Society of Archivists (particularly by the Specialist Repositories Group) during the early 1980s. In 1984 the work of codifying descriptive standards became formalized by the creation of the Archival Description Project at the University of Liverpool. Financed by the British Library (Research and Development Department) and by the Society of Archivists, the project's work

since then has produced a number of publications.

The first was the somewhat sketchy first edition of *MAD* (now termed *MAD1*), which was published in 1986, largely for the purpose of generating discussion. The Archival Description Project subsequently presented the work to British colleagues in a series of seminars held in the society's ten regions, in specialized meetings, and on other occasions, mainly during the years 1987-89. The next publication in the series was a simple-language user guide.[6] The much-expanded second edition, *MAD2*, which we hope will become the standard for the English-speaking world, was published in 1990. There is also a textbook of archival management which incorporates *MAD1* principles, and we expect that there will be another new textbook of professional practice to include the full effect of *MAD2* when this is available.[7]

MAD2 differs from its earlier prototype not only in that it contains much more precise and authoritative rules and recommendations for listing practice, but also in that it has model formats for making finding aids for special types of records series and for special archives. These special types are title deeds (only applicable to the British Isles and certain parts of the Commonwealth), letters and correspondence, photographs, cartographic archives, architectural and other plans, sound archives, film and video archives, and machine-readable archives. Also associated with *MAD2* is a draft UK MARC AMC format, which is discussed at the end of this article.

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[5]Steven Hensen, *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts.* 2d ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1989) and Nancy Sahli, *MARC for Archives and Manuscripts: the AMC Format* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985).

[6]Michael Cook and Margaret Procter, *A MAD User Guide: How to Set about Listing Archives. A Short Explanatory Guide to the Rules and Recommendations of the Manual of Archival Description.* British Library Research & Development Report 5965 (Aldershot, England: Gower, 1989).

[7]Michael Cook, *The Management of Information from Archives* (Aldershot, England: Gower, 1986). The new textbook of professional practice will be published by the Library Association Publishing, London.

The Main Characteristics of the *MAD2* Standard

The *MAD2* standard is difficult to summarize adequately in a brief article, but an indication of some of the leading characteristics can be provided. A fuller summary and explanation is given in the *User Guide*.

First, the *MAD2* standard defines some points of broad principle. It is agreed that archival finding aids (sets of descriptions at any level) are essentially structured databases: that is, they are not simply sequences of free text without the repeating patterns that reveal the existence of an underlying structure which is common to all similar archival descriptions. Creating finding aids is the principal work of all repositories. The aim of an archives service should be to design and produce an integrated system of finding aids that includes lists/inventories, guides, indexes, aids to readers, and authority files. *MAD* proposes that there will be one principal finding aid for each repository in a structural order that preserves and explains the original system which produced the archives. This principal finding aid may be accompanied by other finding aids, which may be arranged according to other principles (for example, in subject order, or for specialized purposes).

Second, archivists are asked to make decisions on four points before commencing work on description: the arrangement of the archives and the use of classification schemes; the levels of arrangement and description to be used; the depth of description;[8] and the possibility of providing for accruals of new material to existing series.

Arrangement of Archives and Use of Classification Schemes. The Society of Archivists and the Business Archives Council have undertaken a series of projects to collect and systematize classification schemes for generic groups of archives. This effort has been going on for some years, and it must be admitted that progress has been difficult. It is agreed, of course, that the purpose of archival classification schemes is primarily for structuring indexes, and is not for use in arranging original materials. British archivists perceive, though, that there is a use for common classification schemes to arrange the archives of organizations and institutions that exist in many locales. The most common example is that of the parishes.[9] If a scheme can be made to work for these, then why not for other institutions—business or manufacturing firms, local authorities, landed estates, universities?

Levels of arrangement and description. *MAD2* assumes that the essential task of an archivist is the analysis of the material in hand into organizationally-related groupings. It gives guidelines for establishing what these groupings are, and how they are related hierarchically. *MAD2* allocates a standard level number to each level of arrangement and description. If these level numbers become familiar to everyone working in the field, they can be used to structure and coordinate data exchange schemes. The standard levels of archival arrangement and description are:

- **Level 1 - Management**: assemblies of archival groups brought together on the basis of some common feature, for the convenience in managing the repository (e.g., official/non-official archives, ecclesiastical archives, private papers).

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[8]In *MAD, depth of description* denotes the fullness or amount of detail in a description, a factor that relates to the purpose of the finding aid. Very full descriptions may be surrogates for the original; very summary descriptions may be useful mainly for administrative purposes.

[9]The parish is a basic unit of local ecclesiastical administration in England and Wales. A typical classification scheme provides categories for: Benefice (the appointment and office of the priest); Church wardens (elected officials who maintained the church and did other public works); Vestry (the assembly of local taxpayers); Overseers (officials who administered the relief of the poor); Tithe (payment of a proportion of crops to the church); Charities; School; etc.

Subordinate groupings may be numbered using decimals of 1.

- **Level 2 - Group or collection (fonds):** the archives of distinct entities. Subgroups (functional divisions within the group) are numbered using decimals of 2, for example, the group Cunard Steam-Ship Co., level 2, may have subgroups of General Manager's Office, Public Relations Office, and Accountants Office, represented as subgroups 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.
- **Level 3 - Series (within Britain, termed** *class***):** physically related sets of archives (e.g., minutes of board of directors, registers of passages, correspondence with clients). Subseries are numbered using decimals of 3.
- **Level 4 - Items:** the unit of physical handling (e.g., volume, file, box).
- **Level 5 - Pieces:** indivisible components (e.g., documents).

Levels 4 and 5 may be used interchangeably in some cases. For example, components of a file might be minute sheets, original in-letters, copy out-letters. Components of a volume are individual pages or folios. Intermediate levels can be inserted at any point by using decimals. For example, Level 2 (group) can have an intermediate level of 2.5 (principal subgroup) and another of 2.75 (subgroup). Data exchange, however, is administered by using the leading integer. Thus a database of group descriptions would include descriptions using decimal fractions of 2, with suitable linkages.

MAD2 proposes that these level numbers should become standard, so that archivists can use them to plan future data exchange programmes. The experience of the Archival Description Project team in testing description models and giving instruction in the use of the standard leads us to recommend that archivists should make a practice of writing the appropriate level numbers into the margin of their lists. These level numbers should be marked in a distinctive way,

perhaps by color, because they are not call numbers and might only confuse readers. The habit of analyzing archival materials into appropriate interdependent levels is a good one. We have found that allocating level numbers has improved listing practices and reduced inconsistencies.

There are rules and recommendations governing the way descriptions at different levels are linked together. The *multi-level rule* states that every finding aid must contain at least two levels of description; in practice, most repositories use three or four. These contain two logically distinct elements: a macro description and micro descriptions. A *macro* description gives information on background, context, and provenance and also information common to the entire set of materials. The macro description governs what follows it. *Micro* descriptions give data about each of the components of the set of archives in turn, without repeating information that appears in the macro description. *Headnotes and title pages* are the ways in which macro descriptions are fitted in above micro descriptions.

It is, of course, perfectly normal for two or more levels of description to appear on the same page of a finding aid. When this happens, some device should be adopted to show the relationship between one level and another. Generally, *MAD2* takes the view that this indicator should be based upon margin widths. Micro descriptions should be slightly narrower than the macro description by which they are governed in order to produce a clearly laid-out page. Figure 1 illustrates the appearance of a typical finding aid.

Depth of description. The *MAD2* rules give guidance on the amount of information—the depth or fullness of the description—that is to be provided. There are three general rules:

- **The rule of representation.** Every archival description aims to create a representation of the original. That

Figure 1. Layout of a Typical Finding Aid

Macro description in headnote

TITLE

FREE TEXT

Micro descriptions in order
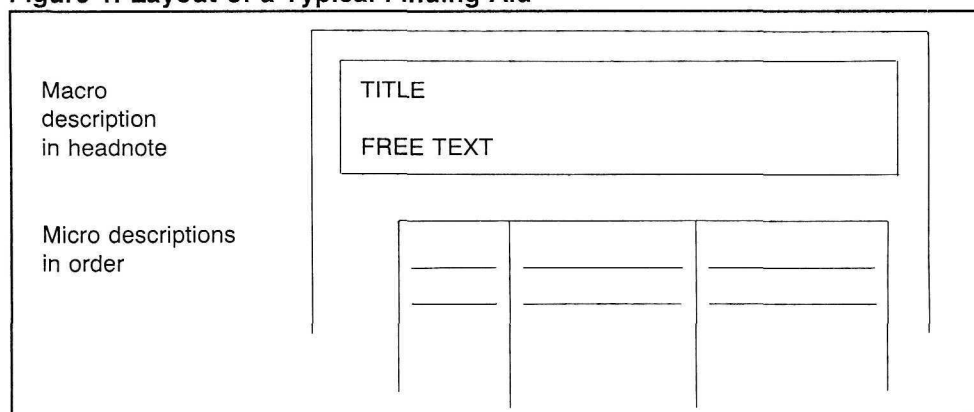
representation has been made for a specific purpose and should be created in a form that will allow the purpose to be fulfilled. For example, a description that is part of a location index need only contain such items as reference code, a note of the bulk of the unit, and its physical form (boxes, volumes, etc.). On the other hand, a finding aid that is aimed at replacing the original to provide remote users with direct access to the information will have to contain an abstract of the contents of the archives.

- **The rule of information retrieval**. The purpose of most descriptions is to help users to find the information they need. Every archival description must contain within its text, or in dedicated fields, all the keywords that would be necessary to retrieve the document, series, or group.[10]
- **The rule against bias**. This rule indicates that descriptions must truly reflect the contents and character of the originals they represent. If particular kinds of

data have been emphasized or omitted, then this should be explained.

Accrual of new material to an existing group or series. The fourth and final point on which description is based is that the finding aid system must allow for the necessary modifications in the text of descriptions.

Models of Finding Aids

After the planning decisions have been made, work can start on the descriptions proper. The bulk of *MAD2* consists of an analysis of data elements and models showing how these elements fit together. Most of the kinds of data that are likely to be used in an archival description are represented in the hierarchical table of elements shown in Figure 2. The table groups related data elements together, first in sub-areas, then in areas and sectors.

The structure implied by the table is flexible. Other than the requirement that some element from the identity statement area be included in every description, any other data element can be left out if it is not needed. Any data element can be used for a description at any level (i.e., management, group/collection, series, item, piece). There should be no restriction on the amount of

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[10]*Key words* are terms that would be employed in a search. Authority files probably should include a relevant thesaurus, but *MAD* must operate in an environment where few repositories have these infrastructural authorities.

Figure 2. Table of Data Elements

ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION SECTOR

Identity statement area
   Reference code
   Title
      Term for form, type or genre
      Name element
      Simple span or bulk dates
Level number
Administrative and custodial history area
   Administrative history
   Custodial history
Content and character area
   Abstract: summarizes content of the archive
   Diplomatic description: data on script, language, etc.
   Physical description: size, bulk, etc.
Access, publication, and reference area
   Access, copying, copyright, use in publication, related materials, exhibition or loan.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SECTOR (data not open to public)

Administrative control information
   Acquisition or accession data
   Location
Process control area
   Processing stages, production for reference, appraisal
Conservation area: repair, etc.

text that can be entered in any area, sub-area, or data element.

Generally, there are two broad families, or modes, of archival descriptions: the *paragraph mode*, in which the components of descriptions are basically paragraphs containing text, arranged down the page; and the *list mode*, in which data is entered in tabulated columns across the page.

Group-level descriptions are likely to

adopt the paragraph mode because the main body of them will probably be the administrative and custodial history, written out as free text. This text usually acts as the macro description, governing more detailed information on subgroups and series. However, it is perfectly possible for short group descriptions to be written out as tabulated lists if this is desired. On the other hand, item- or piece-level descriptions are often in list mode. Any number of columns may be used, but three (reference code, file title, and dates), or sometimes four (adding an original file reference) are common.

Between these two, series descriptions may follow either mode, but their most typical form is for a rather structured pattern. In this there will be a main free-text field, containing the abstract and possibly the administrative and custodial history. Above this are three smaller dedicated fields, containing the reference code, series title and covering dates. Below it are two shorter dedicated fields, containing the bulk and nature of the material.[11]

MAD2 and the *User Guide* give models and patterns for these combinations of descriptions, along with an appendix containing examples from actual practice. *MAD2* concludes with models for the special formats, which are visualized as appendixes to the main finding aid in a repository. For example, most repositories hold a number of photographs, and it may be convenient to compile a separate specialized index to these. The main finding aid should record the archival provenance of the photographs, so that their context is not lost; but the indexing of a photograph is a specialized matter, and there should be provision for information which is not relevant to other materials.

In most cases the finding aids covering

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[11]In *MAD*, a *dedicated field* is limited to a specific data element only, in contrast to a *free text field*, which is unstructured internally, and variable in length.

the special formats are single-level lists. This is possible because the archival context of the originals is securely recorded in the main finding aid system, which includes multi-level description and a full emphasis on archival provenance. This permits a compromise between fully archival descriptive practice, which inevitably involves interlinked files representing different levels of arrangement, each with differing structures and content; and bibliographic description, which deals with items case by case. If the provenance and archival structure of an accumulation can be recorded and displayed in the central finding aid system, then any number of single-level specialized finding aids can be added. We regard this as a most important finding, but find it necessary to add that nothing in the *MAD* standard is innovation. The project team's work has been simply to codify and restate what has become general practice.

The main body of *MAD2* deals with the construction of general finding aids. Subsequent sections go on to deal with specialized aspects. The most significant of these, from an international point of view, concerns standards that underlie data exchange. There is a strong case for improving the exchange of archival data between Britain and the United States. Many of the collections in United States repositories are linked by origin or subject to European collections. Also, the United States practice with online databases has demonstrated the value of sharing this information. The project team therefore included a study on the possibilities of MARC.

MARC AMC and Data Exchange

Associated with the description standard is an adaptation of the Archival and Manuscripts Control (AMC) variant of MARC. This is an extension of the USMARC AMC format published by the Society of American Archivists in 1984, which facilitated substantial progress with the major online databases in North America.

The Archival Description Project has produced a discussion draft of a UK MARC AMC format, and the status of this draft is now being debated in professional circles. Although it is too early to forecast the eventual outcome, the outlook for MARC-based bibliographic databases in Britain and Europe appears doubtful. This is mainly because there is no established interest working in favor of it. In strong contrast to the North American experience, the major academic libraries in Britain are not prepared to undertake any leadership role in this field. The main national database, BLAISE, does not contain archival data and the controlling authority for it. Furthermore, the British Library Bibliographic Services has stated that it is not interested in this development. Professional archival bodies, including the Society of Archivists and the National Council on Archives, have little interest in promoting services that use MARC, since so few archivists have any acquaintance with the system. However, despite these problems, the fact that a draft format now exists at least makes the discussion somewhat more meaningful.

Discussion of the general question of archival databases and the standards they need have also been hampered by non-standard developments. The most rapid expansion of archival electronic databases has occurred without reference to MARC or to collaboration with bibliographic services. The University of Southampton began the trend when it used existing facilities to make public a full calendar of the internationally important Wellington papers in 1984.[12] This database used the STATUS text-management software package and the Joint Academic Network (JANET). JANET access is supplied free to every British academic institution, and it has gateways to other net-

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[12]C. M. Woolgar, "The Wellington Papers Database: an Interim Report," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 9 (1988): 1-20.

works worldwide. For example, North American access to its material is possible through BITNET. To use the Wellington papers, however, it is necessary to learn the command language of STATUS.

The archivists at Southampton University are extending this database program to the papers of the late Earl of Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India. Like the Wellington project, this is best seen as a full-scale editorial and publishing work, in which extensive calendars and even full text of the original documents are given, together with editorial apparatus. For this type of work, MARC formats and bibliographic databases are not suitable vehicles. However, Southampton University and King's College, London, are collaborating in a program that more closely resembles a bibliographic service for the publication of information on the papers of military men.

Other non-standard archival databases are being published through JANET by the University of Glasgow. These include data from university archives and the archives of business concerns. These projects employ different software, and users must become familiar with the conventions of the search package CAFS.

In view of these developments, it is difficult to envision the possibility of setting up or joining bibliographic databases that use MARC and are willing to accept archival data. It would be valuable if there could be a greater awareness of the outreach potential in the services operating in the United States and Canada. Agreement on data formats is clearly necessary before there can be serious planning for data exchange either on a national or on a worldwide scale.

The *MAD* project team concludes that there is great potential in the descriptive standards they are putting forward, and that they should be made known internationally. The apparent conflict between the *MAD* approach, which structures finding aid systems for use in repositories, and the United States standards, which structure bibliographic descriptions of archives, can be resolved. The two can fit well together. Some features of *MAD*, particularly the standard level numbers, are especially well suited to support data exchange. It would be desirable therefore to promote discussion of *MAD* and its various models in professional circles.[13]

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[13]Further information and documents, including copies of the UK MARC AMC draft, are available from the Archival Description Project, Archives Unit, University of Liverpool, L69 3BX, England.