

ARCHIVE SERVICES IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

SERVICIOS DE ARCHIVO EN EL SIGLO XXI

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El servicio de los archivos en la era de la información

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Abstract:

The themes explored in this paper reflect the journey undertaken by the archives profession in the last 70 years. The redefinition of the use of archives and of the role of archivists covers a gradual shift from Archivists as impartial providers of information (1945 to 1970); to Archivists as educators and interpreters (1970 to 1990); then Archivists as representatives of their culture (from 1990), Archivists as community healers (from 2000) and Archivists as cultural defenders (from 2010). Finally, we look at the case for the role of the Archivist-Activist in the present day. Of course, it does not mean that as a new role for the archivist evolved the earlier role was shed.

The conclusion of this analysis is optimistic for the profession: archivists are now key players in preserving trustworthy cultural memories.

Key Words:

Impartiality; Interpretation; Community Archives; Archivist-Activist.

Resumen:

Los temas explorados en este documento reflejan el viaje emprendido por la profesión de los archivos en los últimos 70 años. La redefinición del uso de los archivos y del papel de los archiveros abarca un cambio gradual desde los archiveros como proveedores imparciales de información (1945 a 1970); a los archiveros como educadores e intérpretes (1970 a 1990); los archiveros como representantes de su cultura (desde 1990), los archiveros como sanadores comunitarios (desde 2000) y los archiveros como defensores culturales (desde 2010). Finalmente, analizamos el caso para el papel del Archivero-Activista en la actualidad. Por supuesto, no significa que a medida que se desarrolla un nuevo rol para el archivero, el rol anterior se elimine.

La conclusión de este análisis es optimista para la profesión: los archiveros ahora son actores clave en la preservación de recuerdos culturales fidedignos.

Palabras clave:

Imparcialidad; Interpretación; Archivos de la Comunidad; Archivista-Activista

Dear Colleagues, dear friends,

It is a great pleasure to be addressing friends and colleagues in Spain and an even greater pleasure to be doing this in Andalusia, a home from home for me.

And it is also a very real (though very different) pleasure, to be asked to explore such an open and generous theme. This is an invitation to look to our professional future. Normally, when archivists ride a time machine, it is to look at the past. On this occasion, we will be looking to the future, and at the ethical and philosophical bases on which archive services for the 21st century might be built.

The comments I offer today are based on a long involvement with the international archive movement and, to my utter astonishment, on 45 years' experience as a municipal and territorial archivist in England! Inevitably, in view of this experience, some of my analysis will be seen through a British lens and some through an international lens, but I hope that this will help raise questions and thoughts. Three weeks ago, the Sports Archives Section of the International Council on Archives ran a seminar on the experience of Municipal archives and their management of the records of Olympic Games. It was fascinating to learn about the differences in the management of the archive of the Barcelona and the London Summer Games. A clear lesson to be drawn from international comparisons is that while professional issues are fundamentally the same around the world, the solutions vary from country to country.

Archivists have travelled a long way in the last half century, and while the road has sometimes been difficult and continues to be bumpy, the outcome has been essentially positive. The themes explored today reflect this journey and the gradual redefinition of the use of archives and of the role of archivists. We will be looking at:

- Archivists as impartial providers of information (in northern Europe, this stage equates to the period from 1945 to 1970).
- Archivists as educators and interpreters (an additional role, developed in the period from 1970 to 1990).
- Archivists as representatives of their culture (from 1990).
- Archivists as community healers (from 2000).
- Archivists as cultural defenders (from 2010).

Of course, it does not mean that as a new role evolved the earlier role was shed. On the contrary, there was an expectation of cumulation of roles.

ARCHIVISTS AS IMPARTIAL PROVIDERS OF INFORMATION

It might come as a surprise to newly trained archivists today to find out that 50 years ago, certainly in Anglophone countries, the key text book on archive administration, written by Hilary Jenkinson, envisaged that archivists were meant to be aloof, separate from the administration whose records were in their stewardship. Jenkinson actually argued that archivists should not be involved in the creation and early appraisal of records: more importantly still he stated that archivists should not be involved in records management. One of the early essays I had to write at archive school was precisely on whether records management was part of the role of the archivist. Key to Jenkinson's thinking was the need for complete dissociation and separation of the record creators and the archive keepers. Involving archivists in collection building would, in his view, adulterate the reliability of historical evidence and compromise the impartiality of the archivist.

At that stage, the role of the archivist as an impartial provider of information was protected by very lengthy closures and restrictions on access to records. Government agencies, both at a national and at local and municipal levels, transferred their records to the archives services after long periods of semi-currency.

The role of the archivist has moved on since then but the one significant way in which this distancing still occurs is that, then as now, archivists make no judgement about the use of the material by their users. It remains the case (and it is an important residual legacy) that archivists will make material in public archives available to holocaust deniers or to individuals who wish to sue the agencies whose papers are retained in the archive.

ARCHIVISTS AS EDUCATORS AND INTERPRETERS

While impartiality remained an important objective for archivists in the twentieth century, it soon became apparent that, because of their knowledge of the collections, professionals employed in archive services were best placed to tell the stories of the communities, the institutions and the individuals whose papers they were. It was also felt important that young people should be made aware of the potential contained in archives. Gradually, an uncomfortable compromise evolved in the 1970s and 1980s, where school children were invited to tour archive services and look at (but not touch) historical material.

Then, again in an attempt to keep the archivists away from an interpretative role, teachers were employed by archive services and young people were finally encouraged to interact physically with archival material. The concept that people at all

levels of educational attainment could benefit, could enjoy historical evidence was finally accepted in the relatively recent past. One of the most interesting educational projects delivered at one of the offices in my direction actually encouraged children of primary school age to look at the nature of evidence by re-enacting court trials.

Forty five years ago, the training of archivists was based on the presumption that the relationship between professionals and users would be based on a personal relationship, experienced physically. The archivist, the user and the archives would all be in one reading room together, at the same time. The process of research was a surprisingly intimate process, based on continued and sometimes lengthy exchanges. In the first record office where I worked, one of regular researchers was a dentist who had Wednesday afternoons free – so for years we would see him for half a day per week every week: we would look out for items of interest to him from Thursday to Tuesday.

As collections grew in size and reader numbers multiplied, this became more difficult to deliver. It is worth remembering that at that stage, to justify archive service budgets, growth in usage was the commonest argument. As genealogy became a leading leisure pursuit, archive services were torn between providing services for the majority of their users and still supporting what was still called ‘serious’ research.

Of all the changes in archive practice which have occurred in my working life, none has been as significant in the development of archive services as the idea of the remote use of archives. You will know better than me the reasons for this change – the automation of finding aids, the digitisation of archives and the introduction of born digital material in archive collections. In this, like practice in archaeology or in museology, archive practice has moved dramatically, and perhaps more thinking is needed here. Digital Archive Reading rooms are more than just a website with an automated catalogue and digital versions of the treasures held by each archive service.

In selecting items for digitisation, in setting priorities for the cataloguing of collections, archivists are making choices and imposing perspectives on archive services which need to be explained to users, especially remote users.

ARCHIVISTS AS REPRESENTATIVES OF THEIR CULTURE

It is inevitable that archive practice should reflect as well as inform history writing. The impact of the *Annales* School in France, which gradually permeated the rest of European historical research and methodology in the course of the twentieth century, cannot be overestimated.

For archives, this led to a broadening of archive collecting, a broadening of the spectrum of history for which evidence was needed. It might be characterised by the concept of ‘bottom up’ as well as ‘top down’ archive keeping. Critically, for archivists,

it meant looking at those parts of their communities and cultures which were not visible in their collections.

At the end of the twentieth century, it was not yet a professional given in the UK and elsewhere in Europe that archivists should, in their collecting building, try and reflect the reality of the populations whose narrative the archives were trying save for future generations.

This debate, which sounds rather arcane and technical, was particularly strong among local, regional and territorial archivists. The archivists in Amsterdam, for instance, found it difficult to document important historical realities of their city and argued that to achieve full representativeness the diamond, sex and drugs trades should somehow be reflected in their archival holdings. In London, this period coincided with the building of African Caribbean collections in archive services.

From the end of the 20th century, therefore, we see the opposite of the principle enounced by Hilary Jenkinson developed. Archivists, through active collection building, start imposing their interpretation of the cultures to which they belong. As archive practice evolved, the role of the archivist came to encompass a need for balance and clarity of purpose in collection building.

ARCHIVISTS AS COMMUNITY HEALERS

The role of archives in community identity became better understood from the turn of this century. In some parts of Europe, this was clearly reflected in the founding of community archives: that is to say the development of citizen led groups, focussed on writing, collecting and sharing archives.

In the UK, for instance, early examples of community archive groups developed in deprived areas deeply affected by the closure of the coal mines in the 80s and 90s. This movement was supported by the argument in favour of representativeness in archives, although some professional archivists had difficulty in relating to this development. An example of such a citizen archive is available on the NowThen <<http://nowthen.org/collections>> website, and citizen archives in the UK have banded together to produce a joint website <<http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/archives>>.

Nowadays, ARA, the professional archival association in Ireland and the UK has a formal and understood relationship with the many community archives created in the British Isles and has a Community Archives and Heritage Group in its structure.

In the formal archival structures right around the world, there are now countless examples of the use of archives as essential sources in the exploration of past injustices, crimes, oppression – ranging from evidence in cases of child abuse to records of extensive land expropriations (such as in Derry-Londonderry in Northern Ireland in

the seventeenth century, the subject of a recent project between the Derry Archives and London Metropolitan Archives).

In the UK one of the most telling recent examples of the relevance of archival evidence in community healing is that of the Hillsborough disaster. For those of you who are football fans, you may remember that the disaster, which happened on 15th April 1989 during a Football Association Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest Football Clubs at a football ground in Sheffield, was the worst sporting disaster in British history. Following a police decision, the football ground was over filled and a crowd crush led to 96 deaths and 766 injuries.

In the original analysis, based on police evidence, it was decided that the deaths had been accidental. Following over 20 years of campaigning by the families of the 96 victims, an Independent Panel was appointed to review the evidence in 2009. The independent panel, which reported back in 2012, demonstrated that the police evidence had been tampered with, and new inquests found that the deaths had been caused because of the 'grossly negligent failure' of the police. The following letter appeared in the Guardian Newspaper when the Panel published its findings:

Among the most significant contributions to Hillsborough Independent Panel's report has been that of archivists and records managers. [... They] have been instrumental in making over 45,000 documents available for the first time. They are to be congratulated for their hard work and commitment in enabling the records of the Hillsborough disaster to speak for themselves.

There can be few more powerful examples of the value of archives and records in holding public authorities to account and ensuring transparency in every branch of government and administration.

The composition of the independent panel which was chaired by James Jones, the Bishop of Liverpool is instructive:

- Raju Bhatt, human rights lawyer
- Christine Gifford, expert in the field of access to information
- Katy Jones, investigative journalist
- Bill Kirkup, Associate Chief Medical Officer in the Department of Health (United Kingdom)
- Paul Leighton, former Deputy Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland
- Professor Phil Scraton, expert in criminology
- Peter Sissons, broadcaster (media)
- Sarah Tyacke, formerly Chief Executive of the National Archives

And there we have it: a senior archivist, entrusted, along with 8 other experts, with the review of one of the most emotional and well publicised cases pitching working class people against the establishment, notably the police in the UK. The expert assistance of an archivist was not sought in 1989, but, by the first decade of the 21st century, the requirement for those skills and perspectives was embedded in a landmark case.

Community healing is all the more important at an international level: it is worth mentioning two important initiatives in this context.

- Firstly, the creation of the Arusha Archives and Records section of the United Nations Mechanism of International Criminal Tribunals. The Arusha Archives and Records section holds the judicial records, the administrative and other records of atrocities in various parts of the world (including Rwanda and Yugoslavia). The Arusha Record Centre in Tanzania represents an extraordinary investment in justice by the United Nations and evidence of growing reliance on archives and records as a basis for explanation and understanding.
- Secondly, the work of the Archives and Human Rights working group of the International Council on Archives. Its role is more about developing standards and practices on how archivists should manage this difficult element of their professional work. It issues a monthly newsletter on archives and human rights, it develops projects to increase the cooperation between ICA and archival services and administrations in the field of human rights, and it supports better and wider use of archives in the defence of human rights. Key publications include:
 1. *Basic Principles on the role of Archivists and Records Managers in support of Human Rights*, Archives and Human Rights Working Group - HRWG, updated October, 2016.
 2. Gonzalez-Quintana, Antonio (2009), *Archival Policies in the Protection of Human Rights*, UNESCO, ICA. (available in English, French and Spanish).
 3. *Application of ISAD(G) for Human Rights Archives*, Trudy Huskamp Peterson, 2005 (available in English).

ARCHIVISTS AS CULTURAL DEFENDERS

The idea that the international community has a role to play in rescuing and defending archives as cultural artefacts is a long standing one. The Blue Shield symbol, for instance, goes back to the 1954 Hague Convention. However, it is only in 1996 that Blue Shield International was founded (originally as the International

Committee of the Blue Shield) by four international heritage bodies including ICA to take action in respect of archives and other heritage assets at risk as a consequence of conflict. More recently, its remit was extended to cover natural disasters including climate change. It was originally an informal organisation without a budget, working closely with UNESCO.

The foundation of local country-based blue shield/bouclier bleu/archivists sans frontieres groups then followed in the new century – for instance Belgium in 2000, the UK in 2003, the United States in 2006. The work of these local national committees is important. So for instance, in the UK, after much campaigning by the local Blue Shield committee, the UK Parliament passed the Cultural Property (Armed Conflicts) Act in February 2017. The 1954 Hague Convention and both Protocols were ratified and the Act passed into force in December 2017. The UK Government has released guidance on the implementation of the Act, and UK Blue Shield is now working with them to look at the most effective ways to do this.

Once again, significant delay occurred between the formulation of the archival principle and the creation of the mechanism needed for the implementation of the ensuing action. As I said, Blue Shield goes back to 1954, but programmes such as the Endangered Archives Programme or the drafting and approval of the Guiding Principles for Safe Havens for Archives at Risk are twenty first century initiatives.

The Endangered Archives Programme (EAP <https://eap.bl.uk/>), which was set up in 2004 under the umbrella of the British Library in London, tries to address the loss and damage to archives around the world. Since 2004 EAP has supported over 350 projects in 90 countries worldwide, resulting in over 6.5 million images and 25 thousand sound tracks being preserved. In addition to being accessible through local archival partners, this growing archive of endangered material is available freely online through this website for the benefit of researchers everywhere. This at-risk documentary heritage includes: rare printed sources; manuscripts; visual materials; audiovisual recordings; other objects and artefacts - but normally only where they are found in association with a documentary archive.

The publication of the *Draft Guiding Principles for Safe Havens for Archives at Risk* is another important marker in the increasingly clear definition of the role of the archivist as an active participant in document collection. The document provides guidance on the archival and ethical principles to be taken into account when planning the transfer of analogue or digital archives or copies to another institution (typically in a different country) for safekeeping. The principles, in the words of the editorial committee which drafted the document 'provide guidance to everyone concerned with the protection of archives at risk that are potentially relevant for dealing with the past processes, and who are interested in establishing safe haven solutions, either

as sending or as hosting institutions'. The work was drafted by a committee which comprised Swisspeace, ICA and other individuals. There is hope that the Draft will be accepted as a working document, enshrining ICA policy soon.

Further evidence of the international acknowledgement of the importance of archival ethics in the recent past comes from developments at WIPO – The World Intellectual Property Organisation. WIPO's mission statement – *The World Intellectual Property Organisation promotes innovation and creativity for the economic, social and cultural development of all countries, through a balanced and effective international intellectual property system* – explains its objectives clearly.

The role WIPO plays not just with Patents and Trademarks, but also in dispute resolution in respect of intellectual property, means that its role cannot be underestimated. But it was only in 2011, after the applying of pressure on a very unresponsive body by ICA and the Society of American Archivists that WIPO finally acknowledged that there was a need for the perspective of archivists to be reflected in WIPO debates particularly around the minefield that is Copyright. The tensions between the wishes of large commercial bodies such as Amazon and the right of individuals to use information for free, for instance, can easily be imagined. And one might also reflect on the importance of special exemptions, following the success of the appeal of Stevie Wonder who attended the WIPO Marrakesh meeting personally to make the case for copyright exemptions to '*facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled*' (Marrakesh Treaty 2013).

THE 21ST CENTURY ARCHIVE SERVICE – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

I hope that I have convinced you that the role of the archivist has evolved over the last half century. It follows, naturally, that expectations of what an archive service should deliver have also changed. It will also have become apparent that there are conflicting requirements: How do we remain impartial while still championing our communities and helping define their identities? How do we serve our employing authorities and agencies while promoting the rights of complainants? How can we, as agents employed by bureaucracies hold bureaucracies to account?

The tensions in aligning all these roles nevertheless must be reflected in our archive services of the twenty first century. So what are the essential requirements of 21st century archives services? I suggest we look at these requirements firstly at a practical level and secondly at a theoretical level:

At a practical level the 21st century archive service:

1. Continues to be an archival treasure-house which defines community identity and explains the present.

2. Provides untainted evidence for citizens, in their daily lives.
3. Develops representative archive collections, both paper and digital, and makes them accessible through online catalogues.
4. Serves users both physically present in the reading room and remote, elsewhere in the world.
5. Delivers educational programmes and underpins citizen archives and bottom up historical projects.

At a theoretical level the 21st century archive service:

6. Complies with and challenges and reviews professional standards. I made a fleeting reference to ISAD (G) earlier in this talk, but equally important are the standards which govern the protection and conservation of the physical artefacts themselves and the management of archival buildings. The new conservation standard EN 16893:2018 *Conservation of Cultural Heritage - Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections* is of particular interest. It was adopted by 16 countries immediately following its launch. 45 years ago, this would simply not have happened.
7. Brings together teams of experts to protect the collections and serve users present and future. As with hospitals, where different specialisms come together to help patients recover, so archive services need to bring together specialists who will unlock the meaning and utility of the historical record.
8. Stands by other archival services locally and around the world.

THE 21ST CENTURY ARCHIVE SERVICE -- WHAT WE HAVE YET TO LEARN

And in spite of adjusting to all these requirements, on top of all this, more needs to be done. In some of our professional debates that we are still operating from within our comfort zone.

There are two urgent items on my suggested to-do list:

- Firstly, the digital reading room, which I have already mentioned. A number of services need to be developed to make it work. The ethics which underpin remote services should be spelled out.
- Secondly, working out what the concept of shared heritage/displaced archives really means. Here, I am referring, for instance, to the post-colonial European settlements and how they affected archives. Across the world, we have colleagues who do not agree that the documents which tell the story of colonial expansion are shared heritage. Shared Heritage is an expression

which implies an agreed, settled interpretation of evidence. We need to be more aware of bias in telling difficult narratives. The ICA now has a Shared Heritage Expert Group which at the moment is raising more questions than finding answers – an essential step in the process.

And so, what have we learnt?

It is an exciting time to be an archivist – there are widening objectives for the profession and for archive services in 21st century and our ethical framework is clearer. Witness the development of the Blue Shield network or the role of archivists in public enquiries. The growing relevance of archive services in public administration at national and international levels is now increasingly acknowledged. Witness the adoption by UNESCO of the Universal Declaration on Archives or the inclusion of archivists in WIPO deliberations. The growing relevance of archive services in promoting and collecting dissenting voices, stories told through private papers. Witness the Guiding principles for Safe Havens for Archives at risk. These are fascinating, creative times for us, as we rethink archive services and prepare them for 21st century users. Witness the impact of the Endangered Archives Programme.

Finally, archives is no longer a solitary introverted profession: the day of the archivist-activist has come.