

Culture and evidence: or what good are the archives? Archives and archivists in 20th century England.

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Introduction

Archives have the potential to change people's lives. They are "a fundamental of our democracy, our culture, our community and personal identity" (NCA, 2002). Archives are created to facilitate the conduct of business and accountability; they support a democratic society's expectations for transparency and the protection of rights; they underpin citizens' rights; but they are also the raw material of our history and our memory. Archivists and records managers are responsible for ensuring that these qualities are protected and exploited for the public good. The Philosophy of the Archive conference, where this paper was originally given, focused on the philosophy and politics of archives and debated their evidential and historical value. It examined the construction and recording of memories and identities and explored the tension between the use of archives as a guarantee of accountability on the one hand and the role of archives as cultural artefacts on the other.¹ Archives and records have multiple representations and there is much discussion of values, and of what archives are and what they are for, in the literature.² Many archives and records management services, in practice, seek to meet the multiple requirements of a wide range of interest groups, employers, funders, policy makers, users and the wider public, although with limited resources, choices have to be made about which values gain priority. This paper examines these issues in the context of the historical development of archives and archivists in 20th century England (Shepherd, 2004, 2009). It draws on research which has laid the foundations for understanding how and why the modern archives and records management profession developed in England and uses it to investigate the historical conflict (or is it a continuum?) between archives as culture and archives as evidence. The story identifies and highlights the contributions made by many fascinating individuals who established archive services and professional practice, individuals who

¹ This paper does not seek to examine these (contested) notions in detail, or to review the conceptual relationship between them, but uses the concepts as a framework for the historical account.

² Including, among many others, ed Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz (2002) *Archives, Records and Power*. *Archival Science*, 2: 1-4., C Hamilton, Verne Harris et al (2002) *Refiguring the Archive*. Dordrecht, Netherlands, Kluwer., ed Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, Frank Upward (2005) *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*. Wagga Wagga, NSW, Charles Sturt University.

shaped the archive in a very real way. Their personal enthusiasms, interests and understandings set the course of the English archival profession. To a great extent it was these individuals, rather than governments or legislators, that set the boundaries of English archives and decided what should be accorded archival status and what should not.

Archives and Archivists in 20th century England

This paper explores the relationship between archives as culture and as evidence using the historical context of the archives and records profession in 20th century England.³ The structure of this story focuses on four key themes: a few examples will be used to illustrate each.

The first theme is *political engagement and the enactment of legislation*. The UK government established many Committees and Task Forces, and issued Reports and legislation, between the first Public Record Office Act in 1838 and the formation of The National Archives in 2003. The legislative provision, historically, focused on central government records. Freedom of information widened the scope across the public sector, but there is no national archives system in England, embracing archives from all types of organisations and individuals. What should the role of government be in the provision of archives and records services? Is it inevitable that legislation (and therefore government funding) will privilege evidential values over culture?

The second theme is *a complex and distinct occupation*. The research investigated how national, local, university, business and specialist archives developed in England over the 20th century, looking at which factors have influenced and which have hindered developments. It examined the relationships between the national institutions and local archives, the extent to which development was centrally planned and how far individuals and serendipity played a part. Many archives services promote access and use

³ The focus is on the 20th century, but developments are traced from the Public Record Office Act 1838, the commencement of building of the Public Record Office (PRO) in 1851, the establishment of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC) in 1869, and other key 19th century events. The story concludes in 2003 with the formation of The National Archives bringing together the PRO and HMC; discussions about new national archives and records legislation; and an Archives Task Force, the first significant enquiry into archives for 50 years.

for culture, leisure, learning and community identity. Why is the evidence value so difficult to advocate?

The third theme is *an exclusive professional organisation*. Groups of individuals interested in the use of archives as a leisure and a business pursuit (such as genealogists, record agents, local historians, academics, editors, students, businessmen and lawyers) met together and formed societies from the late 19th century onwards. Most were interested in archives for cultural use, fewer in their value for evidence. Archival associations driven by archivists themselves developed in England from the 1930s. The research looked at the circumstances and reasons for the formation of the main bodies and for their policy development; and how and why professional standards and ethics developed. It illustrates an emerging professional agenda when archivists sought to put boundaries around their work, to include and exclude, to establish ways of seeing and of thinking as a group.

The fourth and final theme is *archives and records management education and research*. English archivists have benefited from quality structured educational programmes, mainly provided within a university context, since 1947. Professional associations and leading individuals influenced the curriculum of university programmes, both in the early years and later through the UK Society of Archivists quinquennial accreditation. Methodology and practice featured strongly in the education, alongside historical studies. And yet, little progress was made in the intellectual and theoretical development of the discipline. Ellis (2005) suggested that the publication of the *Manual of Archive Administration* by Hilary Jenkinson in 1922 codified archival methodology before archival theory could develop, which led archivists to ask 'what' and 'how', but not 'why'. The *Manual* froze archival practice in the early 20th century and prevented theoretical work from developing. There is evidence that the UK is beginning to emerge from the 'ice age' through research.

Political engagement and the enactment of legislation

The first theme is political engagement and the enactment of legislation affecting archives and records. Records and archives are created and maintained by individuals and organisations whose functions and structures

are often strongly influenced by government policies, legislation and regulation. Although government recognised the value of records and archives in many enquiries and reports, very little legislation directly affecting records, except for the records of central government, has been enacted for England. Historically, legislation has privileged evidential values, even though many reports have recognised cultural values. Recent freedom of information legislation, which stretches across the whole public sector, is 'needs blind', that is, it does not privilege one reason for access to records over another, apparently giving equal weight to cultural and evidential uses of records. The UK Public Record Office was one of the first national archives in the world, established by the Public Record Office Act 1838. The Record Commission which inquired into the state of public records between 1800 and 1837 reported that 'the first and most obvious defect in the present system is that records are deposited in different and widely scattered buildings.' It recommended a single central repository for public records and laid the foundations for the 1838 Act (Grigg, 1954). The Act initially only secured the preservation of legal records of the courts of law. Partly to maintain their evidential custody, a senior law lord, Lord Langdale, Master of the Rolls, assumed, 'somewhat unwillingly', temporary responsibility for records in 1837. His office's 'charge and superintendence' in fact continued until 1958. This first piece of legislation clearly focused on archives as evidence: even government departmental records were not included in the scope of the Act until 1852.

Private records were drawn to the government's attention by keen amateurs. The biographer and antiquarian George Harris suggested at the first Congress for the Promotion of Social Science in Birmingham in 1857 that private owners be offered help to catalogue their papers (Ellis, 1969). He proposed a survey of private records, undertaken by special inspectors from the British Museum Manuscripts Department. Although his proposal was rejected then, Harris persisted and in 1869, a Royal Commission for Historical Manuscripts was appointed to list the Cecil papers at Hatfield House. Established initially for five years, the Commission actually continued work until 2003.

William Phillimore, a solicitor and editor of the British Record Society who founded the publishing business Phillimore and Co in 1897, kept up the pressure on government, this time for records of local government. In 1889 he proposed that 'the best means for ensuring the safe custody and preservation of provincial records' was a Central Record Board to replace the HMC and oversee the work of new county record offices, 'established as depositories for local records' (Phillimore, 1889). The Board, chaired by the Master of the Rolls, would inspect all depositories, issue 'rules for the construction, arrangement and maintenance of public record offices', approve the appointment of local Deputy Keepers of Records and regulate the establishment of new local record offices. Such a dream of a regulated, legitimate, centralised, national system was never realised: perhaps if it had been, fewer records would have been preserved for cultural study than have survived in local and university archives.

There are many instances of legislation enacted for reasons of administration, accountability and evidence, having significant unintended consequences on the keeping of records and archives for history and culture. One example of this is the Law of Property Act 1922, amended 1924. The primary purpose of the Act was to revise the law of real and personal estate, to abolish copyhold and other special tenures, but its provisions gave statutory protection to manorial documents which were 'deemed to be documents of such a public nature as to be admissible in evidence'. All manorial documents were to be 'under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls' and he acquired powers to inspect where they were held and require their transfer to a public repository. Public repositories included local cultural institutions, such as public libraries, museums, historical, antiquarian and archaeological societies and a few emerging local archives, where manorial records are now largely used for cultural not evidential purposes.

The strength of legislation for different sectors still varies, from mandatory legislation for central government records to weaker enabling legislation for local records.⁴ Limited protection is afforded to local government archives which are largely culturally based, although information policy legislation (data

⁴ Local Government (Records) Act 1962 and the Local Government Act 1972

protection and freedom of information) which has an apparent evidential aspect, began to improve legislative provision for records and archives in the late 20th century. In a legislative vacuum, archivists engaged with policy makers on key political issues and sought to show how archives could contribute. In the last two decades of the 20th century, a strong link developed with ideas of community and individual identity construction, memory and social inclusion, clearly recognised in the report of the Archives Task Force in 2004 (MLA, 2004), and the role of records in civil rights, justice, transparency and accountability, which offers hope that archives can advocate across the spectrum from culture to evidence.

A complex and distinct occupation

The second theme is the emergence of a complex and distinct role and of a separate group of workers following the particular occupation of archivist (a 'work group'). An identifiable work group developed after the Public Record Office (PRO) building in Chancery Lane was begun in 1851, although it was confined to a few institutions, including the British Museum Manuscripts Department, the Bodleian Library Oxford and the PRO, until local record offices emerged in the 1900s. Specialist, university and business archives did not develop strongly until the 1960s. In the 19th and early 20th centuries archivists were recruited with general historical and classical skills and education and underwent in-house training. They often did not see themselves as archivists but rather as historians, researchers and editors of historical sources. Even at the PRO, whose legislative mandate was the preservation of the records of courts and central government, the archivists had a largely historical bent and their own interests were in archives for cultural research. England does not have 'an integrated national archives service' (Ede, 1975) but rather a patchwork or network which was the result of serendipity and individual enthusiasms.

A couple of stories illustrate this theme. The first is from a county. Local initiatives were often the result of individual enthusiasms. The 1880s saw burgeoning interest in local record publications, the foundation of local antiquarian and record societies and a growth in genealogy (Gray, 1987). Local historical societies, such as the Surtees Society in Northumbria,

published local history sources making them widely available for the first time. The study of local history developed as archaeological societies collected manuscripts and set up libraries and museums. The 'great revolution in academic history' was driven by printed historical sources (such as the Rolls Series) and contributed to a more analytical approach to sources and their management (Knowles, 1963). Local authorities, in a period of change, became aware of their own history and records.

A number of different models of local archives provision developed: some justices and clerks of the peace protected the records of quarter sessions (as evidence); city and borough authorities maintained their records (as evidence but also for culture); and public libraries acquired manuscripts alongside printed materials (as culture). In a few places, privately run antiquarian societies, trusts and museums collected archives in the absence of, or sometimes in conflict with, official bodies. The new county councils began to provide for their county's records. By the early 20th century the forerunner of the modern local archives could be found in the clerk to the council's department holding official deeds and records of the council and its predecessors, mainly for evidential and business uses. However, these offices quickly developed into acquisitive archives, collecting from families, estates, churches and other organisations in the locality and providing cultural, historical and research services to the community. Led by record agents or historians, reliant on individual enthusiasts, attached to local authorities structurally and financially, and lacking legislative legitimacy, local archives were subject to local vicissitudes of policy and funding. Few saw a role in managing records for the council's current business: most privileged archives for culture and history.

Bedfordshire can claim the earliest established county record office, appointing its Records Committee in 1898 and establishing an archive in 1913 (Godber, 1949). In 1906 Dr George Herbert Fowler, a professor of zoology at UCL, moved to the family home in Bedfordshire. By 1909 he had retired from marine zoology and concentrated on gardening and local history (Bell and Stitt, 2002). In 1912 Fowler founded Bedfordshire Historical Records Society and was elected to the county council. He became chairman of the Records Committee, in effect county archivist, a post he held until his death in 1940.

Fowler established the archive before he left for war service in the Naval Intelligence Division in 1914. He introduced sliding steel presses in the store rooms, prepared destruction schedules for current records and devised a classification scheme. Fowler was also an accomplished repairer. Fowler had a vision of an acquisitive historical archive, holding manorial, county, parish and private records. The office opened to public access in 1919. In many ways, Bedfordshire (and Fowler) were pioneers.

Bedfordshire became an important training ground for the archivists who were to oversee the development of the new county record offices.⁵ Fowler (1923) published his book *The care of county muniments*, just a year after Jenkinson's *Manual of archive administration*, 'to draw the attention of County Authorities to the value and interest of their Records in the hope that those of them which have not yet done so may consider the responsibility for guarding them'. He cited two important 'motives for the preservation of County Records': first their 'value as evidence', which he called Record Value, and which derived from the creation of the records as part of an official transaction and preserved in official custody; and secondly, the 'Administrative Value' of records which make the 'daily work of the official easier and more efficient'. Later he cites a third value, 'Historical Value' 'for the information of posterity', which can only be determined by the Archivist. In spite of the impression this gives that evidence values have greater weight, much of the work of Bedfordshire record office, in common with other local archives, focused on records for their historical use. Many of the early county archivists were from historical backgrounds and their personal interest directed the new offices towards historical work, acquiring archives from many different institutions and families in the locality.

The second story is about that uniquely English contribution, the establishment of the National Register of Archives in 1945. The Register was one of the recommendations of the Master of the Rolls Archives Committee

⁵ Fowler noted in 1922 that there is 'no school of training ... from which an efficient archivist could be drawn' so he had 'to train on the spot some young person who has a natural bent towards historical study, who is orderly, methodical and neat fingered'. F G Emmison was appointed in 1923. He was thoroughly trained in Fowler's approach. In 1938 Emmison became the first county archivist of Essex. Fowler also trained I P Collis, who became county archivist of Somerset in 1946; Francis Rowe, who became Cheshire county archivist in 1949; and Joyce Godber who later became county archivist in Bedford.

which considered the measures needed for the reconstruction of archives after the War. It was to bring together the results of the survey work which had been carried out by Historical Manuscripts Commission since 1869 and to identify archives in the localities still in need of description. An Advisory Board was established and a Registrar appointed. Local committees were formed to gather information about municipal, ecclesiastical, parochial and business archives: this project was largely about identifying archives of historical and cultural value. The estimated cost was £6000 for 1945 to 1947, after which time the work would be substantially scaled down (HMC files 1/214, 1/225, 1/232, 1/233 at The National Archives).

How to appoint a Registrar? Names were sought including Dr Thomas, retired Keeper of the Guildhall Library archives, as 'a congenial occupation for the early years of your retirement'. And then they found Lt Col George Malet. Malet had served in both Wars, missing the chance to study at Cambridge University, and worked for Somerset Record Society and as an editor for Eton College archives during the 1930s. After interviewing Malet, the Board somewhat unenthusiastically, 'came to no definite decision, it was more or less agreed that we should appoint [him] if we heard no more of any alternative candidates'. Malet was keen: he wrote 'I would much prefer a job such as the Committee's – one in which I am really interested and which, even if it ends in two years, will be in line with the type of work I hope to do permanently'. He was appointed and the Board reported that his 'zeal and work load is in excess of what was expected'. He steered them through the intricacies of index cards, investigating a type of 'paramount card' which could be mechanically sorted, and promoted the Register as 'a vast Guide to Manuscript Sources covering the needs not only of professional historians but of enquirers seeking information in every field'. Malet quickly realised that the undertaking was extensive and warned in 1945 that it 'might therefore take longer than expected'. Of course, the Register is still going in 2009.

Malet began to establish local committees. By 1951 there were 40 county committees and Malet had addressed many of their meetings, estimating that he had travelled over 30,000 miles for the Register. The meetings caused great local interest (in Brighton over 600 people attended) and 'in at least two

instances this has been the decisive factor in inducing the local authority to appoint an archivist'.

However, the workload was massive. Malet's reports grew increasingly anguished. In 1949 he reported that he was coordinating 25 county committees, 200 area committees and had travelled 10,850 miles in the previous year. In 1951 he complained of the 'extremely serious' staffing situation (efficient clerks were impossible to appoint), declining interest among local volunteers, his own very long hours, weekend work and frequent trips away from home from which 'I often arrive home in the early hours of the morning', and his shortage of money because of the demands of the job to maintain 'a certain standard in clothes', to have a study and telephone at home, to subscribe to local learned societies and take the *Times*. He died in 1952, but the Register lived on.

An exclusive professional organisation

The third theme is the need for an exclusive professional organisation for archivists and records managers, which establishes standards of practice and ethics, builds gateways to entry, lobbies to protect the profession, defines the training and education required and engages with policy makers.

A number of archive-related associations were formed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the British Record Society, and the Council for the Preservation of Business Archives, which became the Business Archives Council. The British Records Association (BRA) in 1932 was the first to address the development of archive policy and the aspiration to act as a voice for archives. It was the pivot point between organisations pursuing the preservation and use of archives as cultural objects and those which enabled archivists to develop a professional community. The Society of Local Archivists formed in 1947 was the first body which was primarily for archivists as a professional group.

New developments in the archival domain in the 20th century usually resulted in the foundation of new bodies, rather than an extension of the remit of existing organisations. This is seen over and over again: the British Records Association broke away from the British Record Society in 1932; the Council for the Preservation of Business Archives was formed in 1933, but separately

from the BRA, since its founders wanted autonomy. The Society of Local Archivists was created independently in 1947. This is their story: One Saturday afternoon in February 1946 eleven local archivists met informally in London 'to consider the question of forming some kind of Local Archivists' Committee, the chief object of which would be to hold meetings at which archivists' practical problems could be discussed'. They proposed forming 'a Section of the British Records Association, to be known as the Local Archivists Section' (Society of Archivists file SA88/1/1, at London Metropolitan Archives). However, Jenkinson and others in the BRA raised a number of practical objections (for example, that a proliferation of Sections would 'cumber the machinery' of the BRA which 'had enough work in hand' already) and rejected the group. Instead, a separate Society of Local Archivists was founded, forerunner of the Society of Archivists.

The splits continued in the 1980s. In 1983 a separate association for records managers, The Records Management Society, was created. The National Council on Archives formed as an umbrella group in 1988 to fill a policy gap. In many cases this separateness was a consequence of the influence of strong leading individuals in the organisations wishing for autonomy, to escape the influence of Jenkinson and later of Peter Walne, County Archivist of Berkshire and then of Hertfordshire and Secretary of the Society of Archivists from 1952 to 1977, who exercised so much control. But the pattern led to discontinuity and a lack of clarity about roles and constituencies; while multiplicity rather than uniformity made the viability of the various bodies uncertain. By the late 20th century, many of these bodies lacked resources, relied on voluntary officers, and duplicated effort. They could not decide whether to represent archives as cultural memory institutions or as evidential knowledge organisations and trying to maintain both personas on limited resources proved challenging.

Hilary Jenkinson's work spanned many disciplines and his career exemplifies the dilemma inherent in these multiple representations of the value of archives. As a scholar, Jenkinson was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and of the Royal Historical Society. He published on a wide range of topics, from seals and tally sticks to early wallpaper. He became joint secretary of Surrey Archaeological Society in 1908. In 1910 he proposed a new Surrey

Record Society which would 'arouse a more widespread interest in Surrey records generally and in their preservation [and] make the material printed immediately available for use by historians and archaeologists'. It was inaugurated in 1913 with Jenkinson as secretary (Jenkinson MSS Add 47/1-2 at UCL Library). As an archivist, his role in the 'creation of a professional consciousness and the establishment of professional practices is undoubted' (Roper, 1989). He was instrumental in the foundation of the British Records Association in 1932 and was its secretary until 1947 and, having settled his differences with the founders of the Society of Archivists, he became its first President in 1954. He was hugely influential in the university programme at UCL from 1947. Many shortlists for posts of county archivist had a 'Jenkinson nominee'.

Yet he undertook all these historical and professional activities in a personal capacity. Jenkinson served at the PRO from 1906-1954, becoming Deputy Keeper in 1947. He was unwilling to let the PRO evolve its archival methods beyond the thinking of the early 20th century (more particularly, 1922). He fiercely protected the unbroken chain of custody of official records and the preservation of original order, provenance and the archive group, which he termed the 'moral defence' of archives. Together with their 'physical defence' (ie preservation and conservation), these 'primary duties' of the archivist underpin evidential value and preserve archives as 'untainted evidence of acts'. Jenkinson claimed (1922) that 'The good Archivist is perhaps the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces.' We might now say that he was naively unaware of issues around the constructed nature of representations of reality and operated in a purely positivist frame, but we could conclude that in his official work he privileged evidence, while in his private interests he privileged culture.

Archives and records management education and research

The final theme is the provision of archives and records management education and research. Education sets parameters for professional work, defines the scope of a profession, provides a gateway (and barrier) for entry and lays the foundations for career development. Archival education in England began formally in 1947 when training schools for archivists were

established at the Universities of Liverpool and London and a practicum-based programme started at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The need for training and examination for archivists had been recognised at least since the publication of the Report on Local Records (1902). It had recommended that custodians of local archives be trained in palaeography and records, which 'postulates the existence of some school where the necessary training could be supplied' and that 'schools of palaeography should be encouraged at the universities to create the supply of archivists', on the model of the Ecole des Chartes in Paris. However, a Report in 1912 concluded that, 'in England appointments for archivists are at present few; local authorities deal with their own archives in their own way and appoint their own curators; and a man who spent several years in preparing himself for the position of archivist might, if he failed to obtain a place in the Public Record Office, find himself stranded without hope of employment'. As a result, it did not advocate 'specialized training' in universities.

In the period between the two world wars, university teaching of palaeography, librarianship, local history and diplomatic developed. These eventually coalesced into archival education in the immediate post-war period in Liverpool and UCL (1947), followed by two courses in Wales (Bangor 1954 and Aberystwyth 1955), together with a practical scheme at the Bodleian Library which ran from 1947 to 1980. During the War many academic activities were severely curtailed, but after 1945 library schools reported that 'the demand for places was stimulated by the flow of students from the Services and the provision of grants ... many libraries have been replenishing or expanding their staffs, and successful students have found little difficulty in obtaining suitable posts after training' (School of Librarianship file 18/3/15, in UCL Records Office). The UCL Library School provided a home for the new Diploma in Archive Administration. The British Records Association, of which Jenkinson was Secretary, had developed a scheme for a graduate Diploma. The syllabus comprised twelve areas including palaeography; archaic languages; diplomatic; English constitutional and administrative history; archival materials; and practical work in a repository. The training was methodological and practical and lacked conceptual content in archive administration. Theory and intellectual effort were focused in the allied

disciplines such as diplomatic and palaeography. Although issues of users and use were not directly addressed, the underlying assumption was that archivists were responsible for preparing archives for historical research: conceptual issues around the nature, definition and value of the record were not considered necessary.

For the next 25 years or so a steady stream of classically trained archivists emerged from the remarkably uniform university schools. Later, new programmes emerged, such as the Roehampton Institute course in business archives (1977) and the Society of Archivists correspondence course (1980-2000). The Society of Archivists also exercised influence over archival education through its quinquennial accreditation of the university programmes, which began in 1984/5. The Society established accreditation criteria, based on its own Diploma syllabus initially, and visited universities as a prelude to recognition of professional qualifications. In the 1990s new subjects, such as records management (at the University of Northumbria) and digital preservation (at the University of Glasgow), and new delivery mechanisms, such as open and distance learning (at the University of Dundee and elsewhere) and more flexible part-time study, were offered, producing graduates with useful work skills.

Huge shifts in the professional skill set and a major investigation into education and training of the work force (Turner, 2004) posed questions about how best to provide for future professional education. The entire professional landscape, and therefore educational needs, has changed radically. Several universities are establishing research programmes which will start to address some of these questions, such as the UCL research centre, ICARUS, which has projects investigating the impact of archives on individuals and communities, developing new models for description, and evaluating the impact of information policy on archives and records management services. The range of research which is now emerging offers multiple views which add richness to the picture.

Conclusions

So what conclusions about culture and evidence can be drawn from these four themes, reflecting on archives and archivists in 20th century England?

During the 19th and 20th centuries, there was a tension between the social value of records to ensure the proper functioning of justice and the courts, and their scholarly, historical and cultural value. At the start of the 21st century the cultural aspects of archives are beginning to be recognised by policy makers as a significant contribution to community identity and social inclusion, while the legal, evidential and accountability aspects are seen as essential to the proper functioning of data protection and freedom of information legislation. There was even serious discussion of new overarching national archives and records legislation in 2003. But with competing political priorities and limited funding, can archives actually deliver everything which this continuum promises?

In the 19th century staff at the PRO were essentially historians pursuing scholarly publication. In the localities, archive work was carried out by antiquarians, editors and record agents who established a network of local archives. It was these local archivists, rather than Jenkinson and the PRO, who largely created the English archival profession. Local authority archives inherited an evidential business remit from quarter sessions and justices of the peace, but, initially as a result of the personal interests of those who established county archive services and later in response to the requirements of users, that was widely neglected in favour of cultural historical interests. Resources were spent on preserving private and local records for historical research, rather than on managing the records of the parent authority for accountability and evidence.

In 1947 two significant markers of emerging professionalism were established: university qualifications in archives and a separate professional body. Although a small professional group, archivists and records managers responded to new interests by setting up new organisations and there were few attempts to consolidate entities. What prevents these bodies from merging to form a single effective organisation to represent the whole profession? Is there an underlying difficulty about reconciling the opposing forces of culture and evidence?

Although on a fairly small scale, the universities provided a remarkably consistent qualification for archivists which, while influenced by the teaching of librarianship or history, was distinctively different from them. However, while

most of the programmes trained students in methodology and practice, they lacked any academic or theoretical research in archival science. In 2008, what should be considered essential and what optional in educational programmes? Can both the culture and evidence agendas be delivered or will educators have to privilege one or the other?

Conclusion: what good are the archives?

All of which brings us to more fundamental questions: what are archives and what are they for? Several authors have attempted to address these questions within the archives. A view from outside which might shed some light is that of John Carey, sometime professor of English literature at Oxford University, in his fascinating little book, *What good are the arts?* (2005). He asks questions such as, what is a work of art?, is high art superior?, do the arts make us better?, and can art be a religion?. He concluded, for example, that it is no longer possible to say that there is a separate category of things called works of art: in the abyss of relativism, “the question, ‘is it a work of art?’ ... can now receive only the answer ‘yes, if you think it is; no, if not’”. And that art experts cannot know every individual response to a work of art, each valid in its own context, and so, Carey says, ‘it seems that none of us knows much about art’. In asking whether the arts make us better, for instance, does exposure to them improve behaviour, increase altruism, is there any correlation between artistic deprivation and anti-social behaviour, he concluded that what little research exists does ‘not support the conventional belief that exposure to the arts makes people better’.

So, to paraphrase John Carey, *What good are the archives?* Is an archive, an archive, simply ‘if I think it is’ or is it possible for experts (archivists, perhaps) to determine positively or contingently what is an archive and what is not? In the past, archivists have sometimes been keen to decide what’s in and what’s not: that oral history or a photographic collection does not constitute an archive, that community archives fall outside the definition, that only appraisal by a professional archivist can determine ‘archival value’, that email could not be a record.

Are archives good for us, can they contribute to a better society, can we measure how much they contribute, and what values do they hold? There

have been many attempts recently to place a value on culture generally and archives in particular, and to measure their impact on society. For example the work done by Holden (2004) on capturing cultural value, introduces a cultural value triangle which balances

- Intrinsic values: 'the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually', 'the capacity and potential of culture to affect us'.
- Instrumental values: 'the ancillary effects of culture, where culture is used to achieve a social or economic purpose'.
- Institutional values: 'how organisations engage with the public', 'creating what the public values', and issues of trust, fairness, and transparency.

Maybe thinking about culture (an intrinsic value) and evidence (which has both instrumental and institutional values) in this kind of framework shows us that they are not inherently in conflict with each other, nor do they fall in different places in a continuum, rather they are essential but separate parts of the balanced triangle. We should, however, heed Carey's warning that trying to impute social values to cultural objects may be chasing a Chimera. Seeking to settle the debate between culture and evidence may prove equally elusive, as may an answer to the question, what good are the archives?

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