



A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence.

David Hume, 1711–76, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748

The word ‘archives’ conjures up different images. Some people picture dusty, dry storage rooms where stuffy, brown-bow-tie curators look askance at anyone who speaks above a whisper. Others imagine websites where listeners can download and listen to podcasts of radio programmes aired just hours earlier. Some people think of old parchments, scrolls and leather-bound volumes of medieval treatises; others see electronic backups of a company’s annual report or an association’s membership list. Two centuries ago, the majority of archival materials were two-dimensional, manually created items, such as papyrus scrolls, parchment codices, bound ledgers or black and white photographs. Today, the holdings of archival institutions may include databases, digital audio files and electronic copies of word-processed memos. Digital technologies have transformed our understanding of the nature of information and communications, and what were considered archives a century ago are only the smallest subset of what might be defined as archives today.

Computers and the internet have also bred a growth industry in the dissemination of digital archival information. Governments, corporations, publishers, music producers, writers, performers and artists have all discovered the value of sharing historical information electronically. Newspapers reprint archived articles in print and online editions.

Broadcasters post copies of radio shows, concerts and interviews on their websites. Music producers repackage old recordings, billing them as treasures from the vault. Entire television channels are devoted to broadcasting ‘classic’ TV shows and movies, and historical documentaries are among the most popular subset of reality TV available today.

As more and more people embrace history, though, the concept of archives has become more ambiguous. The blanket depiction of archives as brittle old documents used by only scholars to write academic histories has been replaced by another stereotype: that archives comprise any piece of information older than yesterday that might be worth referring to again tomorrow. For those who decide to create an online archive of their favorite recipes or music or newspapers articles, the subtleties of language are perhaps of little consequence. But for people whose job is to acquire and preserve unique archival materials and make those holdings available for public use, the changing sense of the word ‘archives’ – and the consequent changes in how people understand and value archives – have forced a fresh look at the nature of archival materials and at the scope of services provided by archival institutions. It is vital, therefore, to start by considering the relationship between archives, information and records and then examine the meaning and nature of archives.

From knowledge to record

Archives are that small portion of all the information, communications, ideas and opinions people generate that are recorded and kept. Archives are tangible products, whether they are physical or electronic, visual, aural or written. Archives must exist in some concrete form in order to be preserved and used. So it is necessary to understand the process by which knowledge becomes information, information becomes a record, and records become archives. The first step is to acknowledge that only the smallest fraction of knowledge we carry around in our minds ever makes its way outside our heads and into some concrete form.

Human beings gain knowledge through their senses. We gain knowledge about a sunset by perceiving the setting sun through our eyes, and we gain knowledge about a piece of music by listening to a concert. If we share that knowledge, we are imparting information: we call our friend to describe the sunset or chat about the concert. If we document that information – or our opinions or ideas about that information – we are creating a record. When we take a photograph of the sunset or tape the concert, we are creating a record of the event. If we write to our friend to tell him about the day at the beach or the night at the symphony we are creating a record not just of the event but of our impressions of and reactions to it.

Archives and the intangible

The vast majority of communications, information and ideas are not documented. We may only recall the sunset or the musical performance in our memories. We may end a negotiation with a handshake, not a written contract. We may not bother to record our opinions about the local election or our experiences during a winter snowstorm. We may never take photographs of our workplace or keep copies of our voice mail messages. The absence of records does not mean that the information, ideas or events never existed, just that there is no residual testimony or explanation of them.

As well, many forms of communication and memory making do not result in the creation of records and archives. Stories and songs, natural and human history artefacts, community rituals and traditions, oral histories and other cultural creations are used to shape memories into narratives and to transform information and recollection from the individual to the collective. A traditional song or dance, a community ritual or an oral tradition or story are more ethereal than archives but may be of equal or greater evidential value to their society. The challenge for the archivist is to establish reasonable boundaries between records and archives and between archives and these other less tangible products of human enterprise. Without defining some clear parameters between the concrete and the dynamic, archivists would be chasing nebulous pieces of information and communications with the archival equivalent of butterfly nets.

Defining records

A record is a piece of information that has been captured on some fixed medium – a piece of paper holding the words of a letter; an electronic file holding an email message; a piece of cellulose acetate tape holding images from a movie film – and that has been created and is used to remember events or information or to provide accountability for decisions or actions. Archives are those records, created or received by a person, a family, an organization, a business or a government in the course of their life and work, which merit preservation because they provide enduring value: because they provide evidence of or information about either the functions, responsibilities, actions or transactions of the creator or about the life and times in which the creator conducted his or her affairs and the society in which he or she lived and worked.

The progression from information to archives can take place as shown in Figure 1.1.

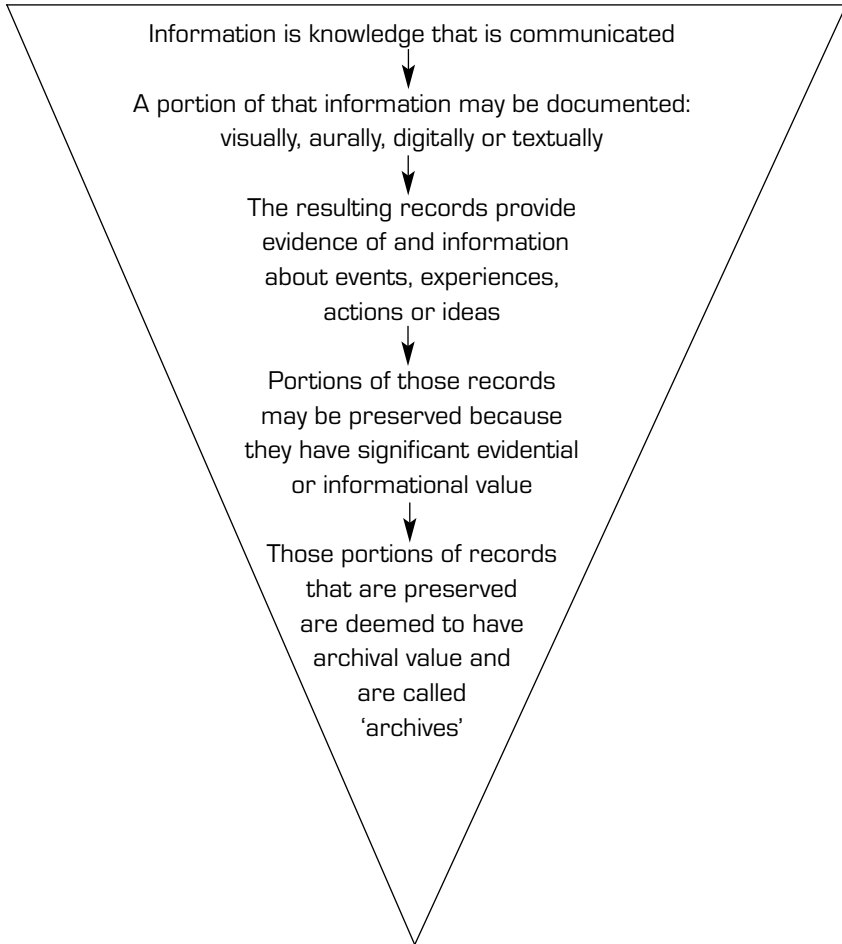


Figure 1.1 The progression from information to archives

Records as documentary evidence

A fundamental quality of records is that they carry documentary value, a quality that distinguishes records from other items with historical or informational value, such as artefacts, publications or works of art (although collections of archival materials may include artefacts, books or art, as discussed later). To be documentary, a record purports to be objective. In other words, it claims to represent actual recollections, decisions or opinions, not fictionalized accounts, as in novels or stories, or creative interpretations, as in works of art, musical compositions or stage or screenplays.

It is this documentary quality that imbues records with an aura of authenticity or truth, allowing us to rely on them not only as information but also as evidence although, as discussed below, it is not reasonable to assume that all records are truly authentic or honest representations. Records are supposed to convey evidence in part because they are created in order to remember something – a piece of information, a decision, an opinion – at a particular moment in time, not ten or 100 years after the fact. Records are a form of written ‘memory’. Someone creates a record, and the record is kept. Later, the record may be used to ‘remember’ whatever it documents: a date, a face, an event or even an emotion.

Some documents are created in order to record an event: minutes of a meeting may confirm decisions and deliberations; holiday photographs preserve special and, one hopes, happy family moments. Other documents actually enact transactions as well as provide evidence that they took place. Deeds and property title documents, for example, are proof of the transfer of ownership from one party to another. The process of signing deeds enacts the change in title. (Before written records were in widespread use in England, this transfer happened through a legal ceremony called a livery of seisin, whereby the party transferring land handed a piece of soil, a tree branch or a key to the party receiving the land, in the presence of witnesses, thereby publicly demonstrating the change in ownership.) Regardless of why the records were created, they purport to be a by-product of a process or transaction – a meeting, a holiday, a land transfer – and they can then serve as evidence of the existence and scope of that process.

Documentary, scientific and physical evidence

Consider the difference between documentary evidence and two other forms of evidence found in society: scientific evidence and physical evidence. An example of scientific evidence might be an ice core drilled from a glacier in Antarctica or the cross section of a tree trunk from a forest in Oregon. The samples are extracted from their natural surroundings, then preserved and studied. For instance, trace gases in ice rings may substantiate or refute hypotheses about weather patterns, while changes in the width or composition of tree rings may help document changes in temperature or rain levels over centuries. To make use of these samples as scientific evidence, a researcher must first devise an experiment to measure or assess a particular substance or quality, after which he compiles and analyses the data gathered. The resulting data can be calculated, recalculated, interpreted and reinterpreted in innumerable ways to prove or disprove particular theories.

Each calculation or measurement may be documented in a record: as part

of a report or analysis, and that record may be deemed to have enduring, archival value. The original ice core or tree ring, however, continues to be objective scientific evidence, available for someone else to use for a new experiment. The chunk of ice or piece of tree was not created in the course of business, like a report or memo or email is. The ice and the wood carry no documentary value and so, although they may be invaluable parts of scientific study, they would not be defined as records.

Documentary evidence is also different from physical evidence, a term most familiar in the world of lawyers and courtrooms. Physical evidence includes tire tracks, footprints, DNA samples or other material items. Like scientific evidence, physical evidence is collected and used to substantiate or rebut assertions or hypotheses, but most often the evidence is collected in relation to a particular situation, with little expectation that anyone would use the same item for a completely separate purpose.

Footprints, for instance, can confirm that a certain shoe stepped into a certain flowerbed, an important piece of information when considering whether a suspected intruder did or did not break into a house through the window in front of the drawing room. A fingerprint on a wine glass can identify an individual beyond doubt. Of course, having the physical evidence does not necessarily confirm precisely when the shoe stepped in the flowerbed or when the owner of the finger or left his mark on the glass. The physical evidence must be interpreted in conjunction with other information in order to demonstrate a linear course of events that supports a particular theory. The arguments presented in the courtroom become records: they are the documentary products of the action of charging and trying a suspect. But the footprints and fingerprints remain physical as opposed to documentary evidence, not archival but still valuable should the case be reopened in years to come.

Content, structure and context

What gives a record its documentary, objective quality? It is not enough to hold up an individual documentary item and say ‘this is truly an authentic and original contract between Robert Kessler and William Edelman’ or ‘this is a diary written by Adele Chiabaka’. A record does not, or should not, sit alone as an isolated item; rather, it derives its meaning from a combination of its content, structure and context, from its relationship with the other items as part of a larger body of unified records, created or received by the same creator over time and understood in the context of the whole, not as a discrete and isolated part. Consider this example.

A scribbled reminder on a sticky note reminds the author to ‘meet Joe’.

The note captures a piece of information. Someone – we do not know who – intends to meet someone named Joe, at some unknown time and place. The note does not prove that the meeting happened, only that it seems to have been planned. The structure of the note is an isolated piece of paper, suggesting that the information was captured informally, perhaps in haste. One might infer that the meeting was not set up well in advance. Further, the note does not identify who was going to meet Joe. It could have been a man, a woman or a child; a colleague, a friend, a lover or a used car salesman. Without any wider context, the content of the note – ‘meet Joe’ – is vague to the point of being meaningless.

But what if the reminder to ‘meet Joe’ was found inside the pages of a ‘day timer’ or written schedule? What if the reminder was written on the page for a particular day: 6 August 2008? And what if the day timer was maintained by the personal secretary to Barack Obama, then the Democratic candidate for the presidency of the USA? Now the note that says ‘meet Joe’ contains a great deal more meaning. On 22 August 2008, Mr Obama announced that Joe Biden, a senator from Delaware, was going to be his running mate in the upcoming American presidential election. The more complete structure, and the resulting greater context, allows the reader of that day timer entry to surmise, though perhaps not yet confirm, that the Joe in question might well have been Joe Biden. The reader can further deduce that the meeting might just relate to the selection of Mr Biden as the vice presidential candidate.

The content of the note has not changed. It still says ‘meet Joe’. But now the content is accompanied by structure and context. The structure of the record is now an entry on the 6 August page of the day timer, allowing the reader to see other appointments and perhaps glean more meaning through other references to Joe. Context comes by the knowledge that the day timer was Barack Obama’s, kept during the weeks and months leading up to the presidential election. The context of the 6 August meeting may be illuminated further by accompanying records: email exchanges between Joe Biden and Barack Obama, nomination papers, minutes of further meetings and so on. And other discrete pieces of information may take on more meaning. What if the day timer also included notes saying ‘meet Evan’, ‘meet Tim’ or ‘meet Hillary’? Would it be reasonable to speculate that those might be meetings with other potential running mates: Evan Bayh, Tim Kaine or Hillary Clinton? The location of the notes in the day timer allows that speculation; other records would be needed to support the hypothesis.

To summarize, **content** is the text, images, sounds or other information that make up the substance of a record. Content is the ‘what’ in the documentary equation. To preserve the content of a record, that content must be ‘fixed’ in space and time. The ink that conveys words must remain

on the sheet of paper, and the chemicals that capture an image must remain on the photographic base. (The challenge with electronic records, as discussed later in this book, is the difficulty of fixing the content when the very nature of electronic technologies allows that content to change so easily.)

Structure relates to the physical and intellectual characteristics that define how a document was created and maintained. Structure provides the ‘how’ of a document. A page within a day timer has a different structure from a sticky note. A page ripped out of a day timer and found by itself in a box of papers has a different structure from the previously intact day timer. The location of an electronic record in a government’s official record-keeping system provides a different structure from a single electronic document found on an unlabelled floppy disk.

Context is the functional, organizational and personal circumstances surrounding the creation of the record. If content is the ‘what’ and structure the ‘how’, context is everything else: the ‘who’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and possibly even ‘why’. Context identifies who created the record, how the record was used and stored and perhaps even why the record existed in the first place. Regardless of media, records gain their context by being kept as part of a larger, organic, unified body of records, not as single items separated from their documentary origins. And, as discussed later, context can also relate to how the record was used before and after it came into archival control; the record’s context changes as the record moves from creator to custodian to user to the public.

Content, context and structure do not necessarily provide absolute, unquestionable proof. The only way we could know who went to ‘meet Joe’ is if we were present at the meeting. But by preserving the content, context and structure of records, archivists help researchers interpret the evidence and understand historical events more clearly. Beyond the notion of content, structure and context, records share three other desirable qualities that help ensure they can be considered trustworthy documentary evidence, meaning that they can serve as a record of events, actions, transactions or decisions at a particular time and a particular place. Ideally, records are static, unique and authentic.

Records are static

When a record is being generated – meeting minutes are being drafted or an email message is being composed – the document is not considered complete; it is a work in progress. But once the minutes are complete or the email message has been sent, the record needs to be secured so that it cannot be changed, intentionally or accidentally, otherwise it might no longer serve as

evidence of the transaction or event it documented. The committee in charge of a particular activity is responsible for confirming that the minutes of its meetings accurately represent the discussions and decisions and ensuring the official record is safeguarded. If someone alters the minutes of a meeting after they have been approved, the minutes are no longer an accurate record of the meeting; if an email is sent but the sender can edit her copy before filing it, the email might no longer be considered reliable evidence. Similarly, the removal of a page from Barack Obama's day timer is a change in the record that can alter the evidential value of both the day timer and the page that has been removed.

Records are unique

Records are also unique, not because each individual piece of paper is unlike any other but because, if records are maintained with their content, structure and context intact, they present a unique sequence of evidence. The minutes of a meeting may not be unique in the sense that there is only one version in existence. There may be ten or 15 copies in the hands of the different members of the committee, never mind all the observers. The minutes are unique because they are found within the official files of the chair of the committee or in the personal records of an observer. It is their relationship to other records associated with the same events or issues that makes the minutes unique in their context.

Records are authentic

Finally, records are authentic, which means that the record can be proven to be what it purports to be. In other words, authenticity is demonstrated if it can be shown that the person who appears to have created, sent or received a record did actually create, send or receive it. Is the record exactly the same now as it was when it was first created and filed? Original signatures, letterheads, official stamps and seals are all indicators of the authenticity of a record, by confirming the authority of the creator. Similarly, handwriting can be analysed to authenticate the authorship of individual documents. Storing records in secure facilities, protected from unauthorized access and change, also helps ensure records remain authentic. An important issue in the preservation of electronic records is the continuous safekeeping of the digital files in order to protect the authenticity of official versions.

Authenticity and truthfulness

Just because one can provide the content, structure and context of a set of records

and can confirm that they are static, unique and authentic, the records may not be truthful. Truth is a malleable concept, and records that purport to contain objective facts may in reality only illustrate a particular person's version of events. Indeed, some records that are authentic evidence can be filled with outright lies. A classic example surrounds the strategy of the Allies in the Second World War known as Operation Bodyguard, so named because Winston Churchill apparently once commented that 'in wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies'.

The goal of Operation Bodyguard was to deceive the Germans into thinking that the planned invasion of Normandy would take place later than actually planned and would occur in locations other than the actual targets. As part of the deception, Allied commanders created documents and communications that contained false information. From a records perspective, these falsified documents can be considered authentic: they were created by Allied officers at a particular date and time; the information they contain is what the officers intended to communicate; and the records were not tampered with later. The fact that the records were full of lies does not mean they are not authentic records. The Allies relied on the records to conduct business, which in this case was the business of lying to the enemy. (An extensive analysis of the deceptions surrounding D-Day is Anthony Cave Brown's *Bodyguard of Lies: the extraordinary true story behind D-Day*, originally published in 1975 and republished by The Lyons Press in 2007.)

Part of the archivist's role, then, is to explain to researchers that while a record may be authentic, it may not tell the truth. Even official records such as census documents or court records contain partial truths: census takers may have misstated the information provided by people at the door; court transcripts record what people said, and those people may have sworn an oath to tell the truth, but that does not mean that, in the end, they upheld that promise. Two documents may provide entirely different versions of the same event; which one of them is 'correct'? It is not up to the archivist to decide but rather to allow the researcher to consider the options based on an analysis of the best evidence available.

Often, the records are not just partial truths but, more specifically, partial records. To prevent the accidental or deliberate loss of valuable records, the archivist welcomes the opportunity to participate actively in deciding what to keep, and ensuring it is kept securely, rather than being handed that which is left and not being able to confirm its authenticity or completeness. One example is the missing 18½ minutes on Tape 342 of the infamous Watergate tapes, which recorded a conversation between US President Richard Nixon and Chief of Staff H. R. 'Bob' Haldeman. Was the erasure deliberate or an innocent mistake? What was said that we can no longer hear? The US National

Archives has attempted unsuccessfully to restore the audio several times; now it holds the tape in a secure and climate-controlled environment in hopes that someday it will be possible to resurrect the missing words. (The Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, under the administration of the National Archives, maintains information about the tapes on its website, at www.nixonlibrary.gov/index.php, including extensive archival descriptions, links to finding aids and copies of reports and investigations into the analysis of the tapes.)

From records to archives

Now it is possible to take the step from records to archives and consider the qualities of archival materials. The appraisal, acquisition and management of archives are discussed at length later; here it is useful to highlight some fundamental concepts about the nature of archives, particularly the fact that, on the one hand, continuous care of records and archives is the ideal but that, on the other hand, no matter why records were created or how they found their way into archival custody, they can be used for any purpose by anyone: the concept of evidence should not be restricted solely to the realm of law and administration.

A record derives its meaning from its content, structure and context, and a record is, ideally, static, unique and authentic. Sometimes the transition from records to archives – from the creation and use of records in an office to their preservation in an archival repository – is easy and automatic. More often, though, archival materials may have travelled a complicated and circuitous route before ending up in the hands of archivists.

To many archivists, the ideal circumstance in which to receive archives is through a formalized and sustained management programme, ensuring a continuity of care from the time records are created and used to the time selected records are placed in archival custody. A government or organization, for instance, may define certain records as having enduring value and therefore intentionally preserve them as archives as a regular part of a records management programme. Establishing a process for transferring custody and care of records from one part of the organization to another allows the documentary resources to move through the system in accordance with established policies and procedures, ideally under the supervision of records professionals explicitly tasked with managing the organization's documentary evidence. As mentioned throughout the book, establishing a formal process for records care (sometimes referred to as a chain of custody or a chain of preservation), while not intended specifically or only to protect archives, is one of the most effective ways to ensure records and archives are available for both current and future use.

In other circumstances, the preservation of archives is neither systematic nor guaranteed. By the time the archivists sees some archives, they may have endured years, if not decades or centuries, of hardship. Sometimes archival preservation is more by accident than design. The archives that make their way into secure custody may only include those boxes that were not hit by fire or flood or the ledgers that were not forgotten in a closet when a company moved offices. A chest full of scrolls might end up in an archival repository hundreds of years after they were first created, and their journey from creation to preservation might have been fraught with perils of near-Biblical proportions.

One scenario is particularly common in smaller archival institutions, such as community or municipal archives or local museum archives. The community may be home to dozens of interest groups, charities, non-profit societies or other organizations, all of which create and keep records, and few of which have any formal facilities to store and manage their records. The local archivist may receive a call one day from the volunteer secretary, the parish council treasurer or the president of the charity, saying 'Please come retrieve these records from my basement, or attic, or loft or storage closet – I have run out of space ... I am moving ... I am no longer on the executive committee.' The materials, which may have been created a year ago or a century ago, have survived in marginal conditions and may be in a fragile state. The archivist is not in a position to judge the quality of care to that point; her task is to rescue the boxes and provide a safe haven for those archives worthy of ongoing preservation.

Preserving the Domesday Book

The vagaries of custody are demonstrated in the story of the Domesday Book, England's oldest surviving public record. The Domesday Book is a two-volume survey of all the land held by the King of England and his chief tenants, commissioned by King William sometime around 1080. The Domesday Book is a census document: it recorded who owned what land, what the land was worth, what taxes were levied and how many people lived on the land. For many centuries the book served as a record, created and maintained for the king's benefit and carried with him from Westminster to Winchester and many other locations as part of his travelling 'office'.

The historical value of the Domesday Book was not really acknowledged until the end of the 16th century, when people realized that the volumes provided the first documented description of towns and villages throughout the country. In the early 17th century, the books were placed in an iron chest for their protection, and in 1859 the book was transferred to the Public

Record Office (PRO) in Chancery Lane, London for permanent preservation. In 1996, the volumes were moved to the PRO offices, now The National Archives, in Kew. While it might have been preferable for the Domesday Book to have been stored in secure vaults, with adequate fire suppression systems and anti-theft devices, such was not the reality of life in England in the 11th, 17th or 19th centuries. Indeed, it is not the reality of records and archives today. While archivists should applaud all sincere attempts to protect documentary resources from harm, they must also accept the reality that records do not always receive the care they might deserve. (Dozens of works have been published on the Domesday Book; for information on the custodial history and current status of the Domesday Book, and to access information from the book online, go the website for the UK National Archives at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/domesday/.)

Archives and the NASA tapes

Archivists can lament, however, when logic suggests that the creators and users of records could have protected them better. In July 1969, the world watched as the Apollo 11 spacecraft launched and as astronaut Neil Armstrong took his – and humanity’s – first steps on the moon, a historic moment broadcast by NASA to a rapt television audience around the world. Not long after the end of the mission, however, several hundred original slow-scan television recordings created by NASA, along with some telemetry data of the landing and moonwalk, disappeared. Despite years of searching, only a small portion of the original audiovisual records have ever been found. In order to reconstruct images of the original events for the 40th anniversary in July 2009, NASA ended up copying videotapes and news broadcasts from television stations around the world.

Today, there is no ‘original’ recording that can provide evidence of the moonwalk from NASA’s perspective, until such time as the missing tapes reappear, if they do. Looking back 40 years after what became a pivotal event in human history, one wonders why the technicians involved with recording the 1969 moonwalk did not provide better care of the records. But bureaucracies are strange creatures, and one cannot necessarily count on organizations, especially large and complex entities, to ensure an adequate continuity of records care.¹

The form of archives

Archives come in all forms, from handwritten diaries to typed letters or word-processed reports; from microfilms to electronic records to audio recordings; from video tapes to DVDs; and from photographic prints to architectural

plans. It does not matter what physical base the evidence rests on; if the record can claim to carry documentary value – to be a by-product of actions, transactions or communications – and if that value is sufficient to warrant ongoing preservation, then the resulting archival material should find a safe home in archival custody.

Illuminated medieval manuscripts may be archives, and so may be 19th-century diaries, Colonial Office dispatches, electronic versions of a local government's constitution and bylaws and photographs of the midway at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. A recording of Winston Churchill's 'the end of the beginning' speech, from November 1941, found in his personal records collection, is archival, as is Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to aboriginal Australians in February 2008, housed in the official archives of the Australian government. The diary of a logger kept during his time in the woods of northern Canada is archival, and so, perhaps, is a backup data tape of an opera society's membership database. The form of archives is of little consequence when considering their value, although, as discussed in Chapter 4, physical form and condition are important considerations when it comes to preserving and protecting the items in question.

Publications and ephemera

Some items that come into archival care may not seem, at first glance, to be archival. Often such materials are categorized – rather vaguely – as 'special collections', 'rare books and special collections', 'ephemera', 'grey literature', 'fugitive literature' and so on. To determining the archival value of these materials, the archivist first needs to consider their place within the context and structure of the larger body of archives and then decide how best to protect them and make them available.

Publications

Publications, for instance, are generally considered non-archival. They are deliberate creations, intended for dissemination and use, produced primarily with an eye to their short- and long-term use by others. They are not documents that have been created and used in the course of daily life and work, and then kept because they provide evidence or information, as 'innocent byproducts' of people's lives and work. But copies of an author's published novel may provide evidence that the publication existed, as a culmination of the writing and editing process documented in manuscripts, page proofs, editorial notes and other materials found among the author's personal papers. The novel has archival value and should be kept. More than likely, the book would remain with

the author's archives, though in some institutions, such as university special collections departments, it may end up stored in another location to facilitate preservation and use. (Issues of storage are addressed later, in Chapter 4.)

Sometimes a copy of a publication written by someone other than the creator of the archives may also have archival value. For instance, among Isaac Newton's archives at Cambridge University is his personal copy of Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652). Ashmole's book was an examination of alchemy – the transmutation of metals into gold – a field of study closely linked with investigations into spirituality and astrology. Newton's copy of the book contains several corrections, additions and references in Newton's own hand, providing evidence that he read and considered Ashmole's work. The presence of the book in Newton's archives, and the evidence that he annotated the book, provides the contextual information necessary to argue that Newton – one of the most influential scientists in history – was aware of and perhaps influenced by Ashmole and others interested in astronomy and alchemy.²

But an archival institution is not normally intended to be a library; certainly it does not develop collections of books and other published materials brought together for common use, within or outside of the walls of the institution. As examined in Chapter 3 the archivist must be clear on the vision, mission and mandate of her institution and recognize the boundaries of her acquisition scope; a library in the same region or sharing similar collection interests should be a supporter, not a source of competition and conflict.

Ephemera

Ephemera can also find a legitimate place within collections of archival materials. Ephemera are those bits and pieces of transitory documentation created for an immediate purpose and then considered obsolete, such as tickets, flyers, pamphlets and posters. By themselves, these items provide little more than confirmation of a service, event or occasion. A train ticket proves that such tickets were printed for train trips from Banff to Vancouver but does not prove who travelled on the train on a particular day. A poster confirms that a political rally was scheduled at a Manchester stadium on November 10 of some year but does not explain whether anyone showed up. A brochure indicates that people in New York could find various works of art in Central Park by following the path shown in the leaflet. By themselves, these items carry only limited evidential value. But when they are found in and among other records, they can help document and contextualize particular events or actions.

Woodstock, the music festival held at a Bethel, New York, dairy farm in 1969, was epitomized by the saying, 'If you can remember it, you weren't

there.’ A ticket from the concert is an interesting piece of ephemera, but as a single item its evidential value is marginal at best. However, the ticket becomes fairly solid proof of attendance if it resides in the archives of a now-aging hippie, accompanied by photographs of him dancing in the mud at the farm, along with several pieces of post-festival correspondence with a fellow reveller, sharing reminiscences of the occasion. As part of this larger body of records from the hippie in question, the ticket becomes infinitely more meaningful. It substantiates his claim that ‘I was there.’

Photographs

Photographs are commonly used to study much more than just the evidence of actions or decisions. The images can depict costumes and hairstyles; illustrate architectural features, automobiles and changing landscapes; and highlight the distinctions between then and now. But the context in which photographs were taken is still critically important: knowing who took the photographs, when and why, is essential to understanding not just the content of the image but also the importance of the event depicted. Photographs of a float in a parade, a train in a station or a group of soldiers sitting with guns upright in a trench tell us what parades looked like, or what train stations or soldiers looked like.

But what if the float is in the first gay pride parade, down Christopher Street to Central Park in New York in June 1970? What if the train in the station shows Japanese Canadians being moved to internment camps away from the British Columbia coast in the Second World War? What if the soldiers are members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps at the start of the 1915 battle of Gallipoli? Without the knowledge that the photographs were taken by organizer of the gay pride parade, an interned Japanese Canadian or a soldier with the Anzacs, we have lost more in evidence than we have gained in information. As discussed later, archivists can and should consider the informational value of archives, but not to the exclusion of understanding and respecting their evidential value.

Other media materials

Motion picture films, sheet music, sound recordings, architectural drawings, maps, postcards, paintings and drawings can also provide documentary evidence; they may well be the products and proof of actions, communications, work and life. If such materials arrive as part of a larger body of archives, the task is to assess their documentary value, consider if and how they should be preserved and then determine if they should be retained within that particular archival facility or if they would be better managed in another location.

Once a decision in principle is reached – they belong with the larger archival collection or they do not – practical considerations come into play. Does the institution have the staff and resources necessary to care for materials in many different media, and if not, will the materials be at risk if they remain in the facility? As discussed in Chapter 6, acquiring archives is a commitment – on the part of the archival institution and, through it, the financial sponsor, the government or the taxpayer – that must be made with due consideration both for the enduring value of the materials and for the very real and ongoing costs of preserving them and making them available. Archives come in all media, and the decision to acquire and preserve archives must be made with the knowledge that different media materials may carry their own documentary value. It is inappropriate to split up archival holdings simply on the basis that some items take one physical form while others take another form.

Archives and artefacts

A boundary emerges, though (and is sometimes crossed), when archivists are presented with three-dimensional objects: artefacts that come in as part of an archival collection. Museum curators face a similar problem when evaluating museum acquisitions that include documentary materials. To forestall issues of territoriality, archivists and their colleagues in museums and galleries should develop a holistic, integrated approach, working together to ensure that the intellectual and historical links between items are maintained, even if the articles themselves find a home elsewhere.

Classic examples of artefacts that may be found in an archival collection are trophies, medals and plaques. These items are artefacts; they were not created – as records are – in the course of daily life and kept as documentary evidence. Rather, they are objects deliberately created to commemorate an achievement or memorialize an event. But such objects may provide valuable contextual information that helps explain aspects of the life of a person or the work of a group. For instance, a trophy may be engraved with ‘John Carlson – first place’, and a plaque may be stamped with ‘Amelia Wong – Business Professional of the Year, 1987’. Considered in relation to associated archival materials, the trophy may flesh out the story of John Carlson: a steamfitter who not only competed with his provincial tennis team but was also president of the local tennis association for 25 years. The plaque may provide a tangible reminder that Amelia Wong formed the first high school work–study programme in her home town, allowing hundreds of students to complete summer internships as part of their high school education and ultimately reducing the school dropout rate in her town by 40%.

If the artefacts are removed before the link is made between object and context, the archival collection and the related artefacts can both lose some meaning as a result. Looking at the artefacts out of context, museum visitors may not learn anything more about John Carlson or Amelia Wong than that they were people who received these awards in those particular years. Similarly, researchers studying John Carlson's or Amelia Wong's archives without considering the related artefacts are denied an opportunity to look beyond documentary facts to engage with tangible, physical objects that help bring the lives of John Carlson or Amelia Wong to life.

Regardless of where an artefact ultimately resides, the archivist has a particular responsibility to maintain the intellectual links among all items that arrive at the door of the repository, particularly if the connections between the different materials is clear and established at the time they come into custody. Any association between materials must be documented even if some of the materials, such as artefacts, publications or works of art, ultimately reside in another facility, such as a museum, a gallery, a library or – as in the example below – a zoo.

In 1922, English archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson published his famous archival treatise, *A Manual of Archival Administration*. In his book, Jenkinson, who worked at the Public Record Office (PRO) in London, struggled with the place of three-dimensional objects in the definition of 'document'. Having had to consider the fate of a range of unusual items that had come to the archives as enclosures within or attachments to archival documents – including human hair, whips, penny pieces and 'a packet of strange powder destined to cure cancer' – Jenkinson finally resolved that such items must be considered part of the document, since they had been received in the archives as part of that archival acquisition. Taking his argument to an extreme that even he referred to as a *reductio ad absurdum*, Jenkinson presented a hypothetical scenario involving an elephant, sent home to the Secretary of State in England from the Viceroy of a faraway colony, accompanied by a 'suitable covering-note or label'. The question Jenkinson asked was this: 'Is the elephant attached to the label or the label to the elephant?'³

Jenkinson solved his own dilemma by suggesting that the matter was in fact administrative, not archival. Logically, the elephant would have been sent to the zoo long before the note made its way into archival custody, and the archivist would never have to deal with matters of pachydermal storage. But Jenkinson did not solve the archival problem: archivists are frequently faced with potential acquisitions of archives that include all manner of three-dimensional materials, from uniforms to bowling balls to football helmets to baby boots, bronzed or otherwise. Whether or not they include them in the holdings of their institution becomes a matter of archival policy, not theory.

Are there other institutions in the region that might more appropriately care for those items, such as a museum, gallery or library? Does the archivist see value in retaining the objects, perhaps to include in exhibits or perhaps because the institution wishes to expand its scope beyond a purely archival focus?

As discussed later, the archivist needs to develop and implement sound and well-thought-out acquisition policies and procedures, from which should come a sensible answer to the question of whether to keep the object or send it away (and, if the latter, to which other facility and why). The museum curator, gallery manager or librarian should ask the same questions if faced with a potential acquisition that includes archival material. But what they should not do is simply split out the different media materials, pack up that which does not fit their particular mandate, and pass the box on somewhere else without documenting the existence, origins and relationship of the different materials to each other.

Keeping Jenkinson's elephant in the archival institution – had it arrived there instead of finding a home in the zoo – would benefit neither the elephant nor the archives. Separating items is often essential to managing them. As long as the contextual information about them is retained, even across institutions, potential users will be able to reconstruct the totality of the materials intellectually, if not always physically. If, however, archives and artefact are so intertwined that separating one from the other would erase any ability to understand either, then the relationship between them must be maintained. A discussion of precisely how to maintain that contextual relationship, within the archival institution or across institutional boundaries, is included in the discussion of arrangement and description in Chapter 7.

Why keep archives?

Why keep archives at all? Who cares about preserving these documentary remains? Why do we bother recording our lives and experiences at the time, and why should anyone bother committing the resources needed to keep those archives for the indefinite future? Ultimately, archives are kept in order to be used, for any number of reasons by any type of user. Researchers, scholars and average citizens refer to archives to find proof; to gather information for research; to illustrate, illuminate or explain. Archives are tools that people use to look beyond the present moment and understand the wider context of a family, a community or a society. Like George Mallory who said he wanted to climb Mount Everest 'because it's there', anyone can use archives for any reason, as long as the archives 'are there'.

One of the numerically largest group of archival users are historians: both

those deemed to be professional, who make their living studying the past, and those whose study of the history of their community, family or home is a personal vocation not a means of employment. The historical accounts produced by these researchers are the means by which many people learn about the past: through textbooks, documentary editions, local studies collections, photographic histories, journal articles, popular magazine stories or family and community histories. While every historian, professional or amateur, brings his or her bias to the task, the accuracy of the story is largely dependent on the availability and completeness of relevant original archival material. Without archives, we would not have the opportunity to agree or disagree with a particular historical analysis, to reinterpret an incident by reassessing the content and purpose of original records or to examine past events through the lens of newly discovered archival holdings.

But archives are not just ‘neat old stuff’. First and foremost, archives serve as evidence: to prove rights, confirm obligations, verify events, and substantiate claims. Archives help us remember the past, and they safeguard us against inaccurate recollections. A written contract reminds two parties of their agreements, but it also prevents one or the other party from avoiding their obligations. If either party fails to meet those obligations, the contract can be held up as objective proof of the original accord.

One of the first steps in deciding whether or not to keep archives, then, is to consider their potential value as evidence, as proof of key actions, decisions or communications. Focusing on the value of archives for evidential, legal or administrative use allows the archivist to ensure that, at the very least, she has captured those archives that demonstrate the fundamental responsibilities and duties of the creator. In the event that only the smallest portion of a body of records can be preserved for the future, the archivist is wise to consider issues of accountability and evidence before assessing, for instance, historical interest or visual appeal.

Archives and accountability

Archives are critical to the support of individual and collective rights. As evidence of how people carry out their actions and transactions, archives help societies uphold the rule of law: the principle enshrined in western culture in the Magna Carta that no one person has the right to act outside the boundaries of society’s rules of conduct. In keeping with the rule of law, a single person or specific group does not carry authority over others as a consequence of some perceived divine right or as a result of the exercise of totalitarian power. Rather, authority of one group over others can only be applied in accordance with publicly accepted laws and with respect for the right of citizens to due process

– that is, to have their rights acknowledged and protected, and to be able to challenge authority when they feel it exceeds the rule of law. Rights come through the law and are upheld in part through the creation, preservation and use of records and archives: to support legitimate claims and refute unsubstantiated declarations.

Accountability and reconciliation in Canada

In Canada between the 1870s and the late 20th century, over 150,000 aboriginal children (including First Nations, Métis and Inuit) were placed in residential schools, many of which were administered by churches and funded by the government. Today, many believe the removal of these children from their homes and families had significant negative consequences, including the loss of native languages and cultures and reported instances of physical, psychological and sexual abuse and neglect. In June 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada delivered a formal apology on behalf of the Canadian government, and the government established an Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission to ‘document the truth’ about the history of the residential schools experience.

Archives are at the heart of this documentation process. Former students at residential schools, along with their families, communities, and anyone else affected by the residential school experience, have been asked to share stories about their experience through interviews and written statements, which will be housed in a national research centre. As well, archival materials – including school records, photographs, inspectors’ reports and personal papers, all created as documentary evidence supporting the daily life and work of the schools, the government or the families and children – will be copied and preserved in the research centre and available for widespread public use. The focus of the truth and reconciliation is very much on ‘reconciliation’, and in this case the archives that are reproduced are perceived as tools of accountability: objective, static evidence that will help Canadians acknowledge past injustices, preserving the past story while creating a supportive environment for moving forward to create improved aboriginal–non-aboriginal relationships.⁴

Archives and evidence of repression

Records that serve accountability may have been created for more objectionable reasons in the first place. For instance, the East German Ministry for State Security or Stasi – a secret security service that monitored the activities of hundreds of thousands of alleged ‘enemies’ of the state from its creation in 1950

to its ultimate dissolution in 1990, created a vast assemblage of files documenting its investigations. The records were used to substantiate claims of anti-government action, and many supposed dissidents were executed without any formal right to protest their innocence.

With the reunification of Germany in 1990, the Stasi began to destroy files in an attempt to remove any evidence of spying, but protestors halted the process and even rescued bags of shredded documents. A government agency, the Office of the Federal Commissioner Preserving the Records of the Ministry for State Security of the GDR, was established to oversee the care of the records and, after much public debate, it was decided that the records would be made available for use. Individuals would be given the right to see their own files and make copies of documents, and the media would be allowed to review records as long as individual information was not published, in order to protect personal privacy. Today, a team of archivists is using sophisticated computer technology to resurrect the content of some 45 million pages of shredded documents. In this case, the preservation of these archives – even those shredded papers that a decade or more ago would have been beyond rescuing – has allowed German citizens and others to exercise their right to understand their individual and collective past and perhaps seek some recognition, if not actual redress.⁵

Archives, memory and history

Archives can serve as evidence in a pure legal sense, but they also communicate facts and information, helping to preserve individual and collective memories and from that allow us to understand who we are, where we came from and, perhaps, where we are going as societies. A contract may remind two businesses of their obligations, but 100 years after the contract has expired, that document may provide insight into how businesses conducted their affairs a century before. A wedding photograph taken in 2010 reminds a young couple of their happy day, but decades hence it might illustrate how brides and grooms dressed for weddings, or it may be the emotional centerpiece of a 50th anniversary party.

Like scientific or physical evidence, the fact that documentary evidence may have been created for one purpose does not mean it cannot be used for another purpose. Recall the ice cores or footprints discussed in the previous chapter. Ice does not form in Antarctica in order for scientists to measure it 20,000 years later. A burglar does not leave his shoeprint in the flowerbed in order for police to find the print and prove the shoe was his. (Quite the opposite, one suspects.) A document, such as a contract, email or a report, was not created in order to provide historians with something to study a century from now. That document was created to record a decision or a

transaction: to confirm mutual obligations (a contract), schedule a luncheon meeting (an email) or assess a new marketing strategy (a report).

The diaries of fishermen or farmers from a century ago can be used today to study changes in fish stocks, weather patterns or the productivity of crops. Ships' passenger logs, created in the first instance to document the movement of visitors and immigrants from one side of the ocean to another, are a primary source of genealogical information. Maps created to mark off areas of settlement in the 18th century might be used today to prove or disprove individual or community claims to right of access to certain parcels of land. A home movie made in 1956 may have documented a family trip to a seaside village; a half-century later it might be used to illustrate changes in population density along the coast.

In England, a set of documents that might today be considered mundane and transient – a list of plants and a collection of garden receipts – were invaluable during the 1995 restoration of the Privy Garden at Hampton Court Palace in England. Archaeologists, historians, landscape architects and other specialists collaborated to return the garden to the original design conceived by King William III and his wife, Queen Mary II in the 1600s. To ensure the restoration was accurate, the team drew on 17th-century drawings, maps and plans, lists of plants, receipts and financial statements and other archival materials. Many of the records might seem inconsequential today – few gardeners keep receipts for any length of time – but many documents were kept by the Palace staff at the time the gardens were constructed and were later preserved as archives, meaning they were available some 300 years later to support the reconstruction process.⁶ In this instance, the archives do not just tell us about the specialized world of horticulture but also support continuity between the past and the present, giving us a sense of place and time beyond the here and now.

Archives, identity and empathy

Archives also expose people to the experiences, emotions and opinions of people long gone, helping them to engage with history and remind them of the lives, happenings and hardships of their ancestors, even generations back. Consider a diary kept by a teenage girl, in which she records her observations of daily life, from the momentous to the mundane. She is not writing this diary for posterity. Instead she is communicating with herself, placing personal thoughts and emotions on a piece of paper. There is little in a diary that may be legally binding. It is not a contract, a report or a spreadsheet. But it is a glimpse into the life and thoughts of a particular individual at a particular time. Fifty or 100 years after the diary was first written, the pictures it paints can reveal a wealth

of information not found in legal or administrative records.

Anne Frank's diary is a famous example. Anne, a Jewish girl in Amsterdam during the Second World War, went into hiding with her family as the Nazis advanced into the Netherlands. While in hiding, Anne kept a diary, full of factual information about the war as well as tales of everyday life – as much as her life was 'everyday' – and expressions of emotion and opinion from a teenage girl. Ultimately, Anne and her family were arrested, and seven months later Anne died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Her father, Otto, who survived the war, discovered Anne's diary on his return to the house in Amsterdam and arranged to have it published in 1947.

Anne's journal is famous today not because Anne was well known at the time; in 1942 she was just another young girl in Amsterdam. Her diary is perhaps most notable simply because it survived while she did not. The diary has become an iconic piece of Holocaust literature, a glimpse into the ordinary moments of a teenage girl's life and the wildly extraordinary circumstances of living in hiding for two years in a war zone. In honour of the international significance of the diary, housed in the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam, it was added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2009.

The diary has been published dozens of times and served as the catalyst for a wide variety of other publications, including Cara Wilson's *Love, Otto: the legacy of Anne Frank*, published by Andrews McMeel in 1995. This book consists of archival reproductions of correspondence between Cara Wilson (then Weiss) and Otto Frank, Anne's father, over 22 years, about Anne, her life and her diary. Wilson's book is an excellent example of the ongoing and fluid nature of archives: the preservation and use of one archival collection can lead to the creation of more records, which then might become archives, which might then be used again, and so on with infinite variety.⁷ The act of keeping Anne's diary safe and making it available for public use is an important step in creating empathy for the life of Jewish people during the Second World War, and in creating a sense of identity for Jewish people, and Dutch society as a whole, by acknowledging and documenting a disastrous time in history, rather than ignoring this tragic past.

★★★

Having considered the nature of records and archives as documentary evidence and explored their value as tools for accountability, evidence, memory and identity, the next chapter examines the nature of archival institutions, starting with a brief overview of the evolution of archival practice.

Notes

- 1 NASA's official website, especially the pages devoted to the 40th anniversary of the moonwalk, include press releases and other documentation about the search for the missing tapes. While the story is presented from NASA's perspective, the website does provide a starting point for learning more about the archival issues associated with the story of the tapes. See www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/apollo/40th/index.html.
- 2 Information about Newton's archives and related holdings at Cambridge University Library can be found through the library's website at www.lib.cam.ac.uk/MSS/Newton.html.
- 3 See Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archival Administration, Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making* (Clarendon Press, 1922), 6–7.
- 4 The official website for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is at www.trc-cvr.ca/links.html. It should be noted that in Canada the terms aboriginal and native are used to refer very generally to indigenous Canadians. The more specific terms – First Nations, Métis and Inuit – have much more precise meanings: First Nations people are defined as members of formally established aboriginal groups, governed by their own band councils or other oversight bodies. Métis people are traditionally defined as persons of mixed Native American and French–Canadian ancestry, while the Inuit are the aboriginal people of Canada's far north.
- 5 Australian lawyer and writer Anne Funder's award-winning analysis, *Stasiland: stories from behind the Berlin Wall* (Granta, 2003), draws on the archives themselves and on interviews with victims of and members of the Stasi to explore the manoeuvrings of, and consequences of, the system of repression. In 1997, British historian Timothy Garton Ash wrote about his own experiences as a graduate student in *Berlin in The File: a personal history* (Random House). Garton Ash fell under the watchful eye of the Stasi when he moved to Berlin in the late 1970s to research Nazi history. In his book, Garton Ash compares the government's files with his own personal diary, finding vast discrepancies between his accounts of his activities and the 'official' evidence of his time in East Germany, another acknowledgement of the archival tenet that archives may be authentic but that they may not, in fact, tell the 'truth'.
- 6 A short but informative analysis of the restoration of the gardens is Mavis Batey's *The Story of the Privy Garden at Hampton Court* (Barn Elms Publishing, 2006).
- 7 The most recent edition of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, to be published in 2010, is edited by Harold Bloom and published by Chelsea House.