Society of Archivists Data Standards Group

A Guide to Archival and Related Standards
Standards applicable to archives; for the digital delivery of repository guides, finding-aids, and images of material from collections.

Title
MAD – Manual of Archival Description

Name of Standards Developing Organisation
The bulk of the work was carried out by the Archival Description Project at the University of Liverpool funded by the Research and Development Department of the British Library between 1985 and 1989.

Current version

Abstract
MAD provides rules and guidance to ensure that descriptions of archival entities are of a consistent and appropriate standard. It covers all formats typically found in a generalist repository and was based, after extensive consultation, on existing best practice in the British context. Additionally it provides a taxonomy for archival description aiming for standardisation in that area.

Description
The first and second editions of MAD appeared in 1986 and in 1989 and the third, revised, and current, edition in 2000. MAD3 takes into account the publication of ISAD(G) and the greater attention paid to the standardisation of archival description internationally in light of the impact of electronic cataloguing and internet access to information. To a great extent it has become the de facto standard for archival description in Britain given that much of the first edition of ISAD(G) was closely aligned to the models and rules proposed in it. It is designed primarily to control descriptive practices in general purpose, rather than specialised repositories (e.g. sound or film archives) which are likely to have format-specific descriptive standards.

Part I of MAD begins with a theoretical analysis establishing the principles on which it rests i.e. that archival descriptions form a file of representations whose existence makes it possible to manage the original materials. These representations can be arranged in variety of ways (different types of finding aid such as lists, calendars, guides indexes etc) into a finding aid system. The overall aim of that system is to provide for the ‘moral defence’ of the archives. The other principles on which the standard is based – and which operate throughout any descriptive operation – concern
- treating archives as collectivities (i.e. that units of archival description are usually aggregates, not single items), and the associated question of levels of arrangement
- the multi-level rule, and the relationship between levels of description

Part II addresses the data structure of archival description, presenting in tabulated form all the informational elements necessary for representation, processing and management purposes. The table is divided into two main sectors: the Archival Description Sector, and the Management Information Sector. These are subdivided in turn into areas and then into individual elements. The areas and elements of the Archival Description Sector have been mapped to ISAD(G).

There then follow specific rules for the use of each data element.

Parts III and IV demonstrate the practical application of the principles, providing models for descriptions of archival entities at all levels of collectivity or aggregation and showing how the data elements are combined in each case. Part IV is a typology of archival descriptions drawn from examples in working repositories; it additionally shows how the concept of level numbering can be applied.

Part V deals with ‘Special formats’ – those record types and formats which are found in generalist repositories but often only incidentally within larger archive groups. These are: title deeds; letters and correspondence; photographs; cartographic archives; architectural and other plans; sound archives; film and video archives; e-records. Drawing on a range of specialist descriptive standards. This Part gives examples of descriptions of such formats drawing attention to any divergence from the rules for ‘general’ description.

Appendices
1. Dictionary of technical terms within MAD3
2. Brief bibliography of descriptive standards and international development work
3. ISAD(G), 1994 edition
4. ISAD(G)/EAD/MAD3 mapping, constructed as a reference source to help with retroconversion, data exchange or other networking initiatives

The Manual is indexed.

Next Month
Next month we will look at EAC-CPF (Encoded Archival Context, Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families), the XML schema for encoding contextual information about persons, corporate bodies, and families related to archival materials
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