Scottish Archive Network

Online Catalogues Project

Guidelines for Collection Descriptions

Version 1.0   November 2000

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INTRODUCTION

These Guidelines are based on the experience of staff of the Scottish Archive Network in compiling collection descriptions for the project in the past 12 months, but also draw heavily on their experience of work in a number of Scottish Archives. The aim of issuing them is twofold. First, it will promote consistency of description across the Scottish archive community and therefore assist archive users in searching for and identifying material. The comprehensive scope of the SCAN project gives it a unique responsibility in this area. Consistency will not be easy to achieve, but the potential benefits for users are immense.   Second, the Guidelines aim to help those participating archives who are undertaking their own Top Level Finding Aid compilation, for eventual incorporation into the SCAN database. The Guidelines will also function as an internal instruction manual for SCAN staff.

In striving for consistency, the project has also tried to balance the needs and circumstances of participating archives. It is clear that participating archives catalogue down to item level in slightly different ways, and that makes it difficult to produce Guidelines to fit every circumstance. However, the bulk of SCAN's descriptions will be at the fonds or collection level only, and there is no question of forcing archives to recatalogue their entire holdings to fit with what SCAN wants. We can only work by adopting a pragmatic approach that takes account of local differences.

Remember that it is not expected that the SCAN descriptions become fossilised. It would be very disappointing if no new accessions are received which alters an existing description, or that as a result of further research it is possible to adjust, say, the "Administrative/Biographical History" element. A procedure for updating an existing entry will be put in place as soon as possible. Updates could come from either the appropriate participating archive, or from SCAN; and conceivably could arise because of comments by users, who notice something which we omitted to mention, or an error.

As work has progressed, we have increasingly realised that supplying descriptions at fonds level will not always be adequate. (This is discussed further below.) Accordingly, the name applied to this part of the project, the "Top Level Finding Aids", is not really appropriate; and when added to the great difficulty already encountered in explaining the concept to the outside world it means that a change of name is essential. On the SCAN web-site the name has become "Online Catalogues", a name which will in future be applied to this part of the project. We have tried to use as much as possible in these Guidelines the term "description" to cover an entry on the eventual database.

USE OF ISAD(G) AS STANDARD

As users of these Guidelines will know, we have been following the precepts of ISAD(G) in creating our descriptions. For the first few months of the project's work, the entries we created were according to the guidelines within ISAD(G) Version 1, but ISAD(G)'s Version 2 became available to us first in March 2000, which has meant some alteration to the way we have compiled our data, and also a slight change to the number of elements we have been using. There are some differences between ISAD(G)'s two editions (for example, the elements in Version 1 called "Dates of creation" and "Dates of accumulation" have been combined into one element, "Date(s)", in Version 2). Mostly the differences are verbal, but it seems that the compilers have tried to reinforce their message in Version 2 by supplying many more actual examples of ISAD(G) in practice. The examples, however, are not to be taken as prescriptive, as ISAD(G) is a data structure standard, not a data content standard, which makes it easier for a world-wide group of archivists to adopt it in principle, but almost certainly will lead to variations in practice in that adoption.

One respect in which we shall differ from ISAD(G) is as regards non-repetition of information in descriptions (see ISAD(G)'s point 2.4). The ARKIS II database system, about which see later, clearly requires users to import suitable data at different levels of description, and data is not carried through from one level to another. For example, therefore, we may have stated at the fonds level of a description that the collection is open. If we were to create a sub-fonds description as well, we would have to repeat that information at that level, because it is a separate record.

The set of ISAD(G) elements we are using is contained at Appendix 1. In this set of Guidelines we have provided only comments about the use we are making of the ISAD(G) elements we are using, and have not commented on what data might be entered for the other elements. We know that in some cases participating archives may have already compiled data suitable for the other elements when undertaking their own descriptions. It is likely that the database we shall employ will take on any extra data which is supplied to us beyond what we ourselves have set out to create, so we are quite happy if participating archives undertaking their own descriptions proceed to create data for more than what we regard as the essential minimum.

Some Archives could have created descriptions according ISAD(G) Version 1. We will, of course, take data in that form and modify it to fit with our requirements, if those Archives do not have the time to undertake the work themselves. (There is, of course, always a possibility that ISAD(G) will be revised again bringing further changes, but all we can do is cross that hurdle when we come to it.)

In the Guidelines, we have not cited the elements of ISAD(G) by their theoretical number, quite deliberately, as the compilers state that the "numbers should not be used to designate elements of description" (paragraph 1.10). As some of the elements have changed names between Versions 1 and 2, referring to elements by their name, rather than their number, is essential. Even though we are not citing element numbers, we have constructed our entries according to the running order in ISAD(G) Version 2. It would help us if contributors did the same. ISAD(G) does not state that it expects users to follow its order of elements, but probably people very quickly will do so when creating a description, even though when the description is made available to users after a search the lay-out could conceivably be different.

SCAN ONLINE CATALOGUE DATABASE

At present (November 2000), SCAN is still negotiating the acquisition of its database package, expected to be the Swedish-designed ARKIS II system. We are developing our knowledge of how the system works behind the scenes, and as we do we see that we have to make minor modifications to the existing lay-out of the data we have been creating, the better to allow the existing data to be migrated with the least bother. This work will continue in the immediate future, and therefore the layout of SCAN-created descriptions will look slightly different from what they have done in the past. This is deliberate, but has no impact on the quality of what we are creating.

The database which SCAN expects to be using will, we expect, be searched as a free-text system, so we are not using subject indexing as access points. Neither of the ISAD(G) Versions have incorporated subject indexing, although it is possible that whenever the standard is next revised this will be accommodated.

SCAN is using a simple MS Word template to create descriptions. This has been designed so that data can be migrated from Word to the database that we shall eventually use. In order to reduce data migration, we do not create individual Word files for each description, but assemble these in batches of 100 or so.

As we become more familiar with the ARKIS II system, we have developed our thinking on data content, and these Guidelines reflect that. In some cases, their recommendations are weighted towards implementation of this particular software system.

WHAT IS A COLLECTION?

Inevitably this will be the most difficult decision faced by those creating descriptions. We are taking a broad view about what constitutes a collection. As far as gifted/deposited collections are concerned, collections would be not only

the major archives of persons/families/corporate bodies, which almost every Archive has, but also each of the miscellaneous small groups of papers which have come from (in many cases) individuals, or which might have been purchased. Therefore, a single document, if received as a discrete unit unrelated to any previous accession from the same source, is as likely to be a "collection" as an archive filling 10, 20 or 50 metres of shelving. Apart from these gifts/deposits, most Archives also have archives to a greater or lesser degree from their employing authority, or records received under some guiding statute, which will also clearly be collections in their own right.

What has so far given us some problems is the number of photocopies (mostly) of original documents held by other Archives which some participating archives have. In some cases, the copies are just a sample of a much larger collection. Not all Archives have given such copies full reference numbers, and have therefore agreed to our not including them within a TLFA description. On the whole, if the copies are just samples, or extracts from a much larger collection held in another accessible Archive, then we would prefer that no TLFA description is compiled, as the original documents would be properly treated elsewhere. If the copies are of documents held by a private individual, and were specifically loaned to the participating archive for copying, then a good case could be made for a TLFA description to be compiled, and we would almost certainly accept such entries.

A possible drawback to the approach which we have adopted is that single item collections receive undue weight within SCAN as a whole. As an example, many Archives will have single letters from or to a minor person, though interesting enough, and within SCAN they will receive a separate description; whereas if such letters had been contained within a large collection, it would be very unlikely that they would receive specific mention at all. There is no way round this, other than to ignore all small collections altogether, which would be unwise as there will be good items within the small collections; or alternatively to lump all the small collections under one or more headings, perhaps by making some subject groupings, and then pick out within the "Scope and Content" element only the most important. The latter approach is certainly better than ignoring the small collections altogether, but choosing what to highlight of the smaller collections grouped together is very subjective. That said, compiling data for the "Scope and Content" element is very subjective anyway.

LEVEL OF DESCRIPTIONS

We shall certainly in some cases seek to obtain descriptions at a lower level than the fonds. The principal purpose of this part of the SCAN project is to create descriptions which have summaries of the collection which will give users a good idea if the collection is likely to contain records of interest to them. There will be cases where a fonds-level description only will not be informative enough for

users. A good example would be a fonds-level description for the records of the Church of Scotland in the widest context, encompassing the General Assembly papers and all its committees, plus perhaps the papers of the individual presbyteries, synods and kirk sessions. Such a description would never help an enquirer who wanted to know if the records of an individual kirk session exist; and therefore a fonds-level description in that case would be of little value if we did not also provide individual descriptions for each kirk session, presbytery etc, as well as taking care with the description for the General Assembly's papers. The same could be said for the records of British Rail and the pre-nationalisation companies: a description at the fonds level could not usefully encompass the records of all the different pre-nationalisation companies.

It is not easy to be prescriptive about the occasions when it might be appropriate to enter data at a lower level than fonds, but certainly we would prefer to keep the number to a minimum. Examples might be some of the larger burghs, where as with the Church of Scotland restricting a description to the fonds level might result in something of little immediate value to users. In that case (depending entirely on the arrangement of the records) entries could be devised for "Town Clerk's records" or "Town Chamberlain's records".

The ARKIS II system allows a full display of cataloguing levels from fonds down, if that is how the catalogue is structured. It is something best seen in practice rather than described on paper, but we expect to make use of this function within SCAN.

LENGTH OF ENTRIES

We are trying our best to keep the descriptions brief. Data for the majority of the elements we are using will always be brief: in many cases the equivalent of one or two lines of typescript. The elements which lend themselves most to longer entries are "Administrative/Biographical History", and "Scope & Content". Even then, however, there is no particular need to provide lengthy accounts under either heading. ISAD(G) does stress that entries for these two elements should be "concise" or "summary". It is best to remember that users will probably not spend very long looking at any one description, and if the description is lengthy and involved users will probably not read it through. Either they will then miss what they really want, or contact the relevant Archive to ask a simple question which is probably answered somewhere in the description. Accordingly, we have found that some descriptions can in fact be prepared very quickly, mostly those for the smallest collections. Many (but by no means all) small collections will in any event be amongst the least important that an Archive holds, and it would be better to spend time working on the better or larger collections to give full weight within SCAN to them.

SCAN GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUAL ISAD(G) ELEMENTS

Reference Code(s)

This unique code is applied to identify each collection. We have decided to employ the Archon numbers, as devised by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, for each of the participating archives within SCAN. The Archon numbers are supplied for each SCAN Archive within Appendix 2.

The reference code commences with the Archon number, eg GB 234; and is then followed by the archive's own code for each collection. Therefore, while the country/repository code is fixed, the rest is supplied by the archive, and might be little more than a letter or two, or a mixture of alpha-numeric codes, depending on local practice. All being well the resulting number will be fairly brief.

Within the ARKIS II system the display will look slightly different from the examples appended below. As with the HE Archives Hub, we are considering best how to display the reference code while making clear at the same time where the records are actually located. Provision of a reference code alone is of little value, as nowhere within all the elements of ISAD(G) are you required to state the name of the repository holding the collection which is the subject of the description. Within a multi-repository web-site such as SCAN's (or the Hub) the reference code alone is insufficient, as users would have little idea where the collection of records they have found is held.   The Hub have a link to the HMC's Archon system at that point to give repository details, but at the time of writing it shows only too well how linking to an external web-site is fraught with difficulties, as the Archon system has changed and the link no longer works properly at all!

Examples of reference codes are:

GB 234 GD1/1167
GB 618 MS 234

Title

This element does cause a little problem. Not every Archive has fixed upon a title based on the provenance of the collection for each of the collections in their care. This is often because of some doubt about the provenance (perhaps because the papers were bought from a dealer or auction, and comprise very miscellaneous oddments with some good material intermingled). Some Archives for certain collections have supplied titles which are almost at subject index level, to fit with the nearest thing they have to a Summary catalogue (the GD1s in NAS being a good example). Other Archives, for very small collections, may not have supplied any title at all, because up to now there has been no immediate requirement to do so.

The consequence is that within SCAN on occasion titles have had to be devised which it is hoped will in general tie the collections involved more closely to provenance than hitherto. Self-evidently the number of occasions on which this has to be done will, we hope, be kept to a minimum, as some collections have been available under one title for many years and different titles could lead to some confusion; but as the majority of collections involved are small, perhaps they will not often have been referred to in published works. In the case of re-named collections where the previous title was subject-oriented, the description within the "Scope & Content" element should ensure that there is no loss of essential data within the overall description.

There may be other occasions in which an altered title will be essential. For example, it might be better to rename a theoretical collection called "EIS (St Andrews)", as while some people would know that the collection was about the Educational Institute of Scotland, by no means everyone will. YMCA records might be another example.

Collections of family papers present their own difficulties. NAS has always tried to ensure that the principal archive of a noble or landed family it holds, if it represents more or less all of the family papers, will be called the xxx Muniments. If the collection is known or thought to be just a small portion of the overall archive, then the normal suffix is "papers". "Collection" is used to denote an artificial accumulation of documents made for antiquarian or other purposes, and includes groups of different family papers held on behalf of clients by their solicitor. Since, however, it will become very evident during the life of SCAN that there are odd units of certain family papers scattered across Scottish archives, it may be hard to achieve overall consistency. There are papers of the Dukes of Hamilton and the Viscounts Melville in a number of repositories, for example, and as far as those families are concerned it might be best to avoid using the suffix Muniments for any one of those units held by one repository. Mostly, however, Archives will know if they do hold the bulk of the papers of a noble or landed family.

Date(s)

The intention here is to render the covering dates for collections. In ISAD(G) Version 1, an effort was made to distinguish dates of accumulation from dates of creation by providing different elements. This has been changed in ISAD(G) Version 2 to dates of creation only, perhaps fortunately, as dates of accumulation will often be hard to elucidate.

While the presentation of dates may seem easy, in practice they are not. NAS's catalogues, drawn up over a period of about 100 years, have thrown up about 60 different ways of specifying dates for individual production units, eg Day/Month/Year, Month/Day/Year, with or without commas separating any of the constituents of the dates. When there are different ways of providing definite

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dates for documents, it comes as little surprise that there is a variety of ways of providing approximate dates for documents lacking internal dates. Mostly, of course, this is a problem when cataloguing to item level, but as many collections covered by SCAN are small and lack obvious fixed dates, then we do have a problem.

Appended (Appendix 3) is a table we have devised which provides guidance we are following when rendering dates, with particular emphasis on uncertain or unknown dates.

Particular difficulty has been encountered with covering dates of collections which comprise at least in part antiquarians' transcripts of early charters. If the original charters transcribed do not survive in the collections, there is little value in rendering the covering dates of such collections as, say, 1248-1897, as it will confuse researchers who are seeking the originals of the charters transcribed, or who are interested in general in medieval documents, if in fact the collection was compiled by a 19th century antiquarian and contains no original material earlier than 1853. In such cases, the best thing to do is to give the dates of creation as, say, 1853-1897, and then state in brackets, say, "(transcripts of documents 1248-1562)".

If the collection does have a few documents from an early period, but then nothing else earlier than, say, 1600, it is best to indicate this in brackets as well, eg: "1278-1842 (predominantly 1600-1842)".

Please supply years only in dates, even if the collection is a single document which has a precise day and month. If the collection covers only one year, then please simply supply that date only once.

Level of description

The main interest for SCAN lies in creating fonds-level descriptions. Therefore, mostly we expect that the level of description to be supplied here will be "fonds". (It may be that within the database the public display screen will read "collection" for that level, but this is not clear at present.)

As mentioned in the Introduction, there will be occasions when we intend to provide a lower-level description as well, which might be sub-fonds (perhaps series as an alternative). When that is the case, remember the effect of a lower-level description elsewhere in the entry – the "Administrative/Biographical History" entry, for example, would quite probably be different from that supplied at fonds level.

Definitions of terms commonly used here are found within the Glossary "Section 0" of ISAD(G) Version 2.

Extent and medium of the unit of description

Our practice in collecting data on extents has changed a little since we began. At first we expected that we would try to supply an extent in metres, as well as at least an estimate of the number of items (or production units) in collections. All the early descriptions we created attempted to do that. It is likely now, however, that we shall simply try to render extents in linear metres. This will at least give a fair idea of size of any one collection to researchers, so that if there is a case where they find more than one collection of more or less the same name (eg one of the pre-vesting railway companies), they can probably identify which is the largest and therefore the principal collection.

We expect that many researchers will be a little uncertain whatever unit we use here. Certainly not many will necessarily understand what an extent of 100 items would mean, which in many archives could easily mean anything from 100 separate sheets of papers, all individually listed as eg correspondence, to 100 bundles of mixed sizes containing all sorts of individual pieces (eg vouchers of account), but where the unit of catalogue description is the bundles only. However, if Archives have only numbers of items per collection available at present, then we will certainly accept that. A mixture of extents, eg 23 microfilm, 156 maps and 2.6 metres, should also be all right. Cubic metres as an extent are fine as well.

Name of creator(s)

We would always prefer that an entry be made here, even if it is the same as the title. The ISAD(G) Version 1 stated that it was not compulsory to provide an entry here if the name to be recorded appeared in the title. The ISAD(G) Version 2 does not give this option, so we do require an entry here.

The intention is that the name recorded here will be accommodated in a linked authority file, which will eventually comprise a very large body of data contributing towards a National Name Authority File. We are deliberately restricting ourselves to creating name authority records for record creators only (rather than for all names which might crop up within the "Administrative/Biographical History" element, for example), as there will be sufficient work within this to keep us fully occupied. It is important that we do create name authority records here, as there will be many cases where there are collections with a common provenance across Scottish Archives, and if we fail to use a consistent form of name for the creator then it could cause confusion; and equally if we have created a name authority record, with biographical data, once then we need not do so again, which will represent a significant time-saving. The overall name authority record within ARKIS II derives much of its format from the ICA's *International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families* (commonly known as *ISAAR: CPF*) (1996).

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Deciding on the name of the creator of the unit of description is not necessarily as easy as it might seem. For many collections, there will certainly be little doubt. For muniments of a noble family, for example, the creator would be the family name plus the peerage title. The creator of corporate records would be the name of the corporate body.   The difficulty arises more with the miscellaneous collections. Some might well have existing titles such as "Railway documents", "Ayrshire Writs", "Estate sales particulars", or something similar, where the supplied title is more of a subject-based one than a provenance-based one. (This touches on the "Title" element above.) Clearly the collection title in any of those examples cannot then also be the name of creator, and some thought will need to be given to the matter.

There will certainly be instances where we must decide that the creator's name is unknown. We shall do our best to reduce the number of such instances to a minimum, but with the best will in the world at times it will be impossible to identify the creator. As examples of what we have found so far, there are collections which consist only of eg a legal formulary, the author of which is not known, or scrap-books of miscellaneous cuttings, or small groups of papers which have been inherited by Archives but whose provenance is quite unknown. In some such cases, it is possible to identify the creator, perhaps by a little research. If the creator's identity is not at all clear, then it would be better to record it as unknown. This has a consequence for the "Administrative/Biographical History" element, as we shall see.

In other cases we could reasonably take as the creator of a collection the Archive itself. Again, this will be done as sparingly as possible. Instances where this might need to happen are when an Archive has brought together in one collection various items or bundles of a similar nature which, perhaps received at different times many years before the Archive was formally created, lack a clear provenance. Many of the classes within the National Archives of Scotland RH (Register House) series could be said to fall under this heading. The records found within this series are artificial accumulations built up by NAS in mostly the mid-20th century, but which (expect for certain classes) are very seldom added to nowadays. Other examples we have encountered so far include some of the National Library small collections accessioned early in its history, where the practice was to guard within one volume under one call number loose items of quite different provenances, partly for ease of storage and security. For such volumes, we would probably take the National Library as the creator of the volume (since without its intervention the volume would not have existed), and then have entries at sub-fonds level for the contents as required. It is best to restrict the occasions when you cite the Archive as the creator to those cases where without doubt the Archive has deliberately brought together in one collection various papers.

It follows from the above that within the "Administrative/Biographical History" element, for such artificial creations, we would be obliged to provide a potted

history of the Archive, as the "History" must be related to the creator. If we were to do a lower-level description here, then the creator there would probably be different (tied much more closely to the records themselves), and there would be a separate "Administrative/Biographical History".

There will be a few instances where it will be necessary to provide more than one creator's name within one entry. It is difficult, as ever, to provide prescriptive advice as to occasions when this will be expected, or likely. Remember that you would be able to introduce new record creators at a lower level, so if we were taking on catalogues from the top level down to item level it would be possible to have different record creators at sub-fonds or series, or even item, level. Therefore, we would not expect to see appearing at the fonds level a whole series of creators' names (of, for example, a company which had changed its formal title frequently, perhaps through mergers or takeovers), if when the catalogue is considered as a whole you would have expected to introduce new record creators at a lower level.

The name of creator given here should be constructed according to the National Council on Archives guide, *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names* (1997). Please present the name without sub-field dividers: the *Rules* presented their examples in that manner for a particular purpose, but that is not necessary here. A name might then look like: "Craigie family, Harroldsgarth, Shapinsay"; or "Stoddart, Thomas Tod (1810-1880), angler and poet".

What we expect to happen within ARKIS II is that the description which appears under the "Administrative/Biographical History" element is the same as the data which we insert in the linked authority file for the "Name of creator".

Eventually when the SCAN database becomes available it will be possible to see if there already exists an entry for a particular person/family/corporate body, and if so what the "Administrative/Biographical History" looks like, which should save some time in preparing descriptions.

Administrative/Biographical History

a)   General points

This is one of the most important fields used by SCAN in the descriptions. The purpose is to provide a summary account of the institution, family or individual that created the collection. This is one of the most subjective areas within ISAD(G) as regards compilation of data, and is unfortunately one where entries have the potential to become long and involved.

Remember, however, that the purpose is to be concise. This is not the place to provide a full-length biography of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, or of

anyone else equally famous, even if the collection does provide some very important papers about the individual/institution/family concerned. Equally, we do not want the entry to be so summary about well-known individuals that researchers coming across that individual for the first time are left uncertain about the person's life and work. Therefore, an entry for papers of Sir Walter Scott should never just say: "Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was a Scottish author who wrote many books". Compiling data for this element requires some judgement on the part of the compiler.

In writing your "Administrative/Biographical History", please try your best not to copy text directly from the work of others in published accounts. There could be a real difficulty with copyrighted text, and an author who sees his/her text copied directly into something appearing within the SCAN web-site may not be happy. If it is essential that someone's existing text is copied, then a full credit should be given to that authority.

If there exists a useful source about the life of the individual, company history etc then please cite it at the end of the entry, providing full details of the author, title, journal title (if the source is a periodical article), place of publication (for books), volume number (if a periodical), and year of publication. It is a moot point if you need to provide a reference to a biography of, say, Sir Walter Scott, given that so many will know of him, or even in such cases if you need to mention the *Dictionary of National Biography* as a possible source. On the whole it seems more sensible to provide a cross-reference than not. The drawback of a reference to the *DNB* is that it now so out of date (for pre-1900 people especially), but that should be obviated by the new edition, although it is not due to be published until 2004. References to basic guides such as *Scots Peerage*, *The Complete Peerage*, *Handbook of British Chronology* etc should be avoided. Also to be avoided are references to books/articles etc which are known to be inaccurate. There is no obligation to provide a reference source: you will need to use your judgement as to whether a reference in any particular case is worthwhile.

It is certainly in order to provide a reference to something available on another web-site, on the assumption that the data there is worth a reference. An example is a web-site which includes some biographical data on Scottish writers: http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~crumey/scot.html.

If the creator's name is unknown, and that is the entry recorded under "Name of Creator(s)", then it stands to reason that you cannot enter any data within this element, as the entry is supposed to be about the creator. Here we have normally stated something such as "No information available" if the creator's name is unknown. Clearly if in the future the collection's creator can be properly identified, then a change can be made to the entry. It would, however, be possible to insert some contextual information in this field, even though the

creator's name is unknown and therefore the main "Administrative/Biographical History" field is effectively blank. For further comment about this, see below.

There may be occasions when information is more or less impossible to find about a record creator. In such cases, state what you can, even if it is barely a line or two, as it is better than nothing at all. As ever, changes can be made later.

b)   Contextual information/"common fonds"

In compiling the entry for this element, it is important to ensure that the data focuses on general information about the individual/family/organization that created the collection. Contextual information, that is data which is more about the creator's link to the unit of description, should as much as possible be kept in a separate paragraph. We shall of course maintain that contextual data within the SCAN system, but it will be held within a different field within ARKIS II. We fully understand that at times it will be very difficult to provide any helpful biographical data about a person without referring to something found in the collection (for example, if the collection is little more than an invoice or two from some long-forgotten plumber, and all you can say then is that Mr xxx had a plumber's business in Auchtermuchty). At times, therefore, keeping contextual data separate from the remaining administrative or biographical information may be a pious hope only.

It is hard to give a good concrete example of what we mean by contextual data which might be kept separate from the rest of the administrative or biographical information. Say, however, that we have 10 instances of collections of Caledonian Railway records within Scottish Archives in SCAN, then the basic "Administrative/Biographical History" element would be the same in every case. One collection, however, is specifically about one or two stations or signal boxes, and one could then add on a little contextual information for that collection which would not be suitable at all for every other collection.

This is related directly to what we hope to make fair use of within SCAN, the provision of "common fonds" entries, for want of a better term. By this, we hope to maintain within SCAN a set of standard "Administrative/Biographical History" entries for records which are frequently found within the participating archives. These entries would then always form the basis for the "Administrative/Biographical History" element for relevant collections. Their existence will save quite a lot of time in description building, but should also be generally helpful to the archive community, as when linked to a standard form of name of the creator of a collection they become an essential part of a National Name Authority File. It would not really be sensible (or probably practicable) to have different versions of an "Administrative/Biographical History" for one creator within a National Name Authority File.

There are two types of "common fonds" entries involved here. First, there are the ones which are no more than building blocks for completion with suitable data appropriate for only one collection. The building blocks contain data common to any number of similar collections: certain burgh records, or sheriff courts, lend themselves to this type of entry. The second group of "common fonds" entries is one where the entries compiled should be suitable within themselves for every collection of that nature which is found. Here, good examples would be a biography of Sir Walter Scott, railway company administrative histories and the like.

The "common fonds" building blocks would certainly require additional data. These additional comments when attached to the basic data for local authority etc "common fonds" would not normally be separated out as being contextual for those collections, because they are just building blocks. We have distributed already some draft examples of such entries (mostly local authority ones) for comment. Other such entries will be compiled in the near future.

As for the other type of "common fonds" entries, eg for some of the pre-nationalisation railway companies, we would hope that entries for eg the Caledonian Railway would suit every circumstance as much as possible, and any modifications to them would affect every relevant collection. Additions would in some cases be an example of "contextual data" as mentioned above, as it is possible that the additional data would be to set a specific collection of records in a unique context.

When we intend to apply a "common fonds" entry to a particular collection, we will of course inform the archivist in charge of the Archive holding that collection, so that they have the chance to consider if any general modifications might or have to be made.

Scope and Content

As with "Administrative/Biographical History", this important element does lend itself to the probability of rather subjective entries. The purpose is to "enable users to judge the potential relevance of the unit of description" by providing a "summary of the scope (such as time periods, geography) and content (such as documentary forms, subject matter, administrative processes) of the unit of description appropriate to the level of description".

In this case we can see that there are clear possibilities of divergent practice, in part arising from the lack of significant examples within ISAD(G) Version 1. The examples in Version 2 have tended to emphasise a textual approach to the compilation of data here, whereas SCAN has been consistently following from the start its own practice of summarising the types of record (eg Minute books etc), followed by covering dates. We believe that our practice does not conflict with the approach suggested by the ISAD(G) Version 2 examples. The purpose

of this element is to permit researchers to judge if the collection (the level always featured within SCAN) contains materials likely to be of interest to them; and when linked with the Administrative/Biographical History, we believe that the "Scope and Content" entries we have compiled will do so. We have always felt that for users best to be able to judge if the collection contains relevant material they need to know, if the collection contains, for example, minute books, precisely what period of years the run of minute books covers, rather than the simple fact that they exist in the collection, which is what some of the ISAD(G) examples at collection level show.

What we have always to bear in mind is that entries here need to be considered in the context of a multi-level description, even if the SCAN entries do not go beyond the fonds level. For this reason, we are trying our best to be as concise as we can, so that if at some future point it does become possible to construct entries for lower levels for all collections as little adjustment as possible needs to be made to the "Scope and Content" at the fonds level (perhaps because entries have been too detailed).

If the collection being described is small, then the entry here might be very similar to the item-level catalogue for the collection.

Conditions governing access

The purpose of this field is clear. The intention is to let users know if they will be able to access the material at all if they are interested, and if there are any restrictions on access then how they may be dealt with, if possible. While for many collections within SCAN there will be no restrictions at all, and we have tended to use the word "Open" as the standard term here, other collections (such as files of the Scottish Office/Executive, some deposited collections etc) will be closed against access either for a particular period of time, or in a very few cases indefinitely. Here would also be the point at which you might remark that the collection is not to be accessed while re-cataloguing is in process etc.

What we have done in some cases where there is a restriction on access, based on discussions with the archivist in charge of the repository, is to state that "Access may be restricted – consult the archivist at xxxx Archives for further information". If access is known to be restricted for a definite period, it would be better to state that (including the point at which the collection will be open) rather than just give the sort of general advice on restrictions just mentioned. Within the system there would be a suitable link to a page which provided the information necessary for users to contact the appropriate person. In all cases, however, we would certainly not be giving for a means of lifting access restrictions etc the contact address of a person/institution outside the repository where the records are held, unless the repository specifically wants us to do so.

Language/scripts of material

This element allows compilers not only to record the fact that there are, for example, items in German or French as well as the expected English, but also to record any distinctive scripts used. Scripts would be, perhaps, different types of handwriting seen on charters of the medieval period.

Within SCAN, we have no intention of recording scripts as well as languages. We can barely recall seeing any catalogue where such detail is given, as it is not normal for cataloguers to provide such detail; and as we are as much as possible compiling the descriptions from the catalogues, rather than having constant recurrence to the documents themselves, the lack of information about scripts in catalogues makes entries of this nature impracticable. Researchers who know what medieval documents are about will know that different types of handwriting will be used; those who don't know anything about medieval documents will not be any the wiser if we record that certain documents are written in "English cursive documentary script". Although we expect that we shall be recording some MSS which are more formal medieval MSS (ie texts, rather than title deeds), we shall still not record any information about the style of handwriting used unless the catalogue which is the basis of the description provides any information.

The language part of the element is more important. We have been considering how best to record instances where the language used is likely to be Scots in some form, rather than what users might expect to find if we simply recorded the language as English. What we have arrived at is "English/Scots". If there are title deeds, especially older ones, it would be useful to be able to record that some items in Latin.

It is not, of course, always easy to be sure about the languages used without checking the documents themselves, but if it is possible to do so then getting that right does help readers.

Finding aids

Here we need to record the existence and availability of appropriate finding aids. Mostly we would expect the information to be that there is a catalogue to item level available within the Archive holding the collection. If the finding aid is available in electronic form, that could certainly be mentioned, especially if the electronic catalogue is available on-line. A hyper-text link to the on-line catalogue would be inserted.

We have decided, however, that we would like to record also the availability of copies of the catalogues held as National Register of Archives (Scotland) surveys, or indeed at the NRA in London, so if you know of the existence of copies there that information could be recorded as well, with the number of the

survey. Published versions of catalogues can also be mentioned, as long as full details are provided.

Related units of description

ISAD(G) Version 2 allows you here to enter information about units of description in the same repository or elsewhere that "are related by provenance or other association(s)". We are trying to restrict ourselves to collections related by provenance. This is because drawing the widest (but fair) interpretation to ISAD(G)'s statement would allow you to provide never-ending lists of related material to almost anything. You could, for example, say that correspondence of any type is related to any other group of correspondence simply because it is correspondence. When compiling a description for any one kirk session, you could say that all other collections of kirk session records in Scotland are related to it because they are also kirk session records. The same could be said for county or town council records.

For this reason, we would prefer to restrict the amount of linkage. Given that the body of descriptions will be encompassed within a database, if you have come across a collection of records for one kirk session or town council by a specific search within the database, you should be able to appreciate that varying the search term slightly will throw up references to a much larger group of such records for other areas of the country. Material related by provenance would, of course, be thrown up by a specific search (eg a search for "Caledonian Railway" will always give amongst successful hits all collections of Caledonian Railway records), but depending on the existing knowledge of a reader some searches will be helpfully opened up by the inclusion of "Related material". For example, if a user entered as a search term a place such as Carnoustie, then the hits should include burgh records, kirk session records, probably railway records etc; and checking through those hits the user may well realise that the source he/she particularly wants to use has some material related by provenance elsewhere, but which is not immediately thrown up by his/her specific search term.

Preferably an entry here would provide the collection reference code (as used in the relevant ISAD(G) element) and title (again as used in the relevant ISAD(G) element): ie something such as "GB 234 GD16 Airlie Muniments".

Archivist's Note

We are using this field to say which member of SCAN staff compiled the description which precedes this element. In the database this might be managed by means of a drop-down box containing the names of SCAN staff only (for ease of use), but for the time being we shall continue with our policy of stating "Description prepared by [name], Scottish Archive Network project", which as a standard piece of data is copied throughout our template. Archives compiling their own descriptions should insert their own names here as they wish. This

information will be retained within the SCAN description within ARKIS II in the relevant area.

Rules or Conventions

Under this we are specifying that we have used ISAD(G) Version 2 as the Rule that we have been using. Again this is copied throughout the template. We expect that we shall adjust this in the database to explain that we are following SCAN guidelines based on ISAD(G) Version 2 and the NCA *Rules*. This is a more accurate description of what we are following, partly because we are only employing a selected number of the ISAD(G) elements, and because we are also using the NCA *Rules* as the standard for the presentation of the name of the creator of the collection.

Date(s) of descriptions

Here we have usually entered the month and year when we compiled the description, which again is uniformly copied throughout the template. We expect that what will happen with the ARKIS II system is that the date will be automatically entered into the description when we create a new entry. When an update or amendment is made the system will show that fact as well, also automatically.

APPENDIX 1   SCAN MODEL OF ISAD(G) ELEMENTS

Formal names of ISAD(G) elements used by Scottish Archive Network Project, as per 2nd edition (2000)

Information contained in square brackets is simply intended for guidance.

Reference code(s)

Title

Date(s) [of accumulation/creation]

Level of description

Extent and medium of the unit of description

Name of creator(s)

Administrative/Biographical history

Scope and content

Conditions governing access

Language/scripts of material

Finding aids [available]

Related units of description

Archivist's note

Rules or Conventions

Date(s) of descriptions [ie when this description was prepared and/or revised]

As compiled March 2000

APPENDIX 2   PARTICIPATING ARCHIVES ARCHON NUMBERS

ARCHIVE NAME	ARCHON NUMBER
Aberdeen City Archives	230
Aberdeen University Special Collections and Archives	231
Aberdeenshire Archives	228
Angus Archives	618
Ayrshire Archives Centre	244
Clan Donald Centre	1892
Dumfries and Galloway Archives	226
Dundee City Archive and Record Centre	251
Dundee University Archives	254
Edinburgh University Library Archives & Special Collections Dept.	237
Falkirk Museum History Research Centre	558
Glasgow Caledonian University	1847
Glasgow City Archives	243
Glasgow School of Art Archives	1694
Glasgow University Archives and Business Records Centre	248
Glasgow University Library Special Collections	247
Greater Glasgow Health Board Archives	812
Heriot Watt University Archives	582
Highland Council Archive	232
Jordanhill Archives (part of Strathclyde University Archives)	249
Lothian Health Services Archive	239
Midlothian Council Archives	584
Mount Stuart Trust	N/A
National Archives of Scotland	234
National Library of Scotland	233
National Register of Archives (Scotland) (part of NAS)	234
National Trust for Scotland Archives	1873
North Highland Council Archive	1741
North Lanarkshire Archives	1778
Northern Health Services Archives	1105
Orkney Archives	241
Perth and Kinross Council Archive	252
Royal Bank of Scotland Archives	1502
Royal College of Nursing Archives	1199
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow	250
Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh	779
Scottish Borders Archive and Local History Centre	1097
Scottish Jewish Archive Centre	1220
Scottish Screen Archive	2120
Scottish Theatre Archive (part of GUL Spec. Coll.)	247 STA
Shetland Archives	242
South Lanarkshire Council	1828
St Andrews University Library	227
Stirling Council Archive Services	224
Stirling University Library	559
Strathclyde University Archives	249
Waterways Trust	1961
West Lothian Council Archives	1829

Note: N/A = currently unavailable   Information as at 14/11/2000

APPENDIX 3
TABLE OF UNCERTAIN/APPROXIMATE DATES, WITH SUGGESTED IMPLIED MEANINGS

Dates as entered in description	Actual meaning of dates within database
19th century	equals 1800-1899
early 19th century	equals 1800-1840
mid-19th century	equals 1830-1870
late 19th century	equals 1860-1899
c 1950	equals 1945-1955
c 1860 - 1886	equals 1855-1886
c 1860 - 1890's	equals 1855-1899
1940's - 1975	equals 1940-1975
1840's - 1850's	equals 1840-1859
1816 - c 1821	equals 1816-1826
c 1816 - c 1821	equals 1811-1826
c 1950's	*don't use this – too vague*

The above table shows on the left hand side some date forms we have come across in supplying covering dates for collections, and on the right hand side what those dates should mean if an equivalent in actual year dates were to be given. For a date search within the database it is important that we have an equivalent in "real" years, and the table shows what we would propose to do with the approximate dates cited. We have taken "c1815" to mean any time between 1810 and 1820, although in our view it is a much more certain date than 1810's, as it should imply that the compiler thinks that the item is most likely to be 1815, give or take a year or two; while 1810's would mean that the compiler really hasn't a clue if it is any one of the years from 1810 to 1819. If dates for a collection are being supplied, and the compiler knows that there are items definitely of 1810 or so and 1819 or so, while the rest are probably of that decade, it would be better to provide the two known terminal dates rather than supplying the vaguer date range of 1810's.