

The challenges of cataloguing and promoting an archive: the Tyrone Guthrie Case Study
Presentation given by Dr Bethany Sinclair-Giardini, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

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SLIDE 1: Opening Montage

In an office at the end of the corridor, on the ground floor, of the old PRONI premises on Balmoral Avenue, in the leafy affluent suburbs of south Belfast, an archivist opened a box of D3585/Add. Inside, tightly packed, lay a few hundred letters as well as what might be terms as 'printed ephemera.' This was the twentieth box, so about a third of the way through the collection and each one of these boxes fed into a bigger picture, and ultimately fed into a complex narrative that was slowly forming and evolving in the mind of the archivist. It was at that point, when the archivist began to consider how such records might be described, that she felt as though she was an unofficial novelist, creating a story that might appeal to researchers. A story. She was thinking of writing a story. This bothered her. She was an archivist, a supposedly neutral custodian of records. Having transferred from the public records department the year before, it was easier to be a neutral custodian of government records she surmised. Government records were accessioned in as part of a retention and disposal system, already part of an original order, the order created by the record creators. Since moving to private records however, things had begun to get more complex. The original order, she thought, was not always there. Endless conversations with colleagues took place at how best to catalogue collections. And as the archivist sat, leafing through the papers in box 20 of 70 or so, she couldn't help thinking that if her colleague had been processing this collection, that his story would be different.

And that was me. Wondering if I was going to be writing the right 'story' that would best reflect this complex yet fascinating archive. Our seminal father of English archive studies, Hilary Jenkinson, would surely be horrified at my choice of word: 'story' but a story it was.

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, or PRONI, is not a literary archive; we are the resting place for the documentary heritage of Northern Ireland.

Slide 2: PRONI

PRONI was established by an Act of Parliament: the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 and thereafter opened as the official repository for public records in the then newly formed state of Northern Ireland, one of the (at the moment) four constituent parts of the UK. For almost a hundred years, it has continued to receive records from government departments, courts of law, local authorities and other public bodies as you might expect, and also perhaps more unexpectedly, it has received numerous records from private individuals, companies and organisations, including the 'big house' network in Ulster;

churches and other religious institutions; private individuals and all manner of private enterprises. Following the Four Courts Fire in Dublin in 1922, much of the documentary heritage of Ulster was lost and so our early Deputy Keeper of the Records, David Chart, pursued a fairly aggressive accession policy in order to fill this gap. This wide accessioning remit continues today and his vision can be seen across the strength and breadth of our collections today. As one former director pointed out (Gerry Slater, 2001), PRONI occupies a unique remit within the United Kingdom as it is not only a national archive repository for Northern Ireland, but also acts as a manuscripts section of a national library (given that Northern Ireland is the only country within the British Isles without a national library of its own), and also PRONI acts as the sole county record office for each of the six counties of Northern Ireland and in some instances, the historic nine counties of Ulster. It therefore covers a wide remit, and has much to offer the potential researcher. We hold over 3 million records, 1.8 million of which are classed as private records. Our oldest document dates to 1219, and our newest to 2013. Whilst we are not a literary archive, we do hold important literary archive material, including the rich documentary heritage of Sir Tyrone Guthrie, playwright, director and theatre man extraordinaire of the 20th century. This paper will introduce the challenges of cataloguing a literary archive within PRONI's unique environment, and more importantly, I will attempt to unpack some of the issues experienced in cataloguing and promoting this archive to suitable audiences, with particular emphasis on the cultural utility of the text, specifically within archival catalogue descriptions. I doubt if I will get onto the promotion and marketing aspects of this today, but feel free to collar me at lunch if you've any questions about that! First of all though, a paragraph about Tyrone Guthrie himself, in case people are not familiar with his life.

Slide 3: Guthrie Montage

Tyrone Guthrie, known as Tony, was born in 1900 in Tunbridge Wells in Kent. Guthrie is often considered the pioneer of the radio play, clocking up many scriptwriting successes for both the BBC Northern Ireland during the 1920s and the Canadian Broadcasting Co in the 1930s. Guthrie's career was successful, long and often controversial. His love for theatre took him all over the world including the States, Canada, throughout Europe, the Middle East and Australia. He worked closely with the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells theatres in London, eventually becoming their Governor in 1956. He directed many famous players including Laurence Olivier, Alex Guinness, James Mason and Vivienne Leigh in both contemporary plays as well as many Shakespeare revivals. Guthrie founded the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford in Ontario, Canada in 1953 as well as having established the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis a decade later. He died in 1971 at Annaghmakerrig, Co Monaghan. Annaghmakerrig is now administered by the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, a company formed in July 1979 to carry into effect the provisions of Sir Tyrone Guthrie's Will. These were, as regards the house, that it should be run as a centre or retreat for artists. Amongst the trustees are the Directors of the Arts Councils (North and South), and it was Mr Kenneth Jamison, then Director of the Arts Council in the North who originally approached PRONI with a view to obtaining help with the unsorted and very miscellaneous papers to be found in various parts of the house. This was undertaken and the papers were successfully accessioned and catalogued into the Annaghmakerrig collection at D3585/F.

The archive measures to around 70 feet, and is packed into around 60 standard PRONI boxes and around 10 larger, what we call, dress boxes, particularly in the case of photographs and artworks. My main aim when cataloguing this collection was for it to be useful. It needed to be accessible and understandable, to attract the serious academic attention I felt the collection deserved.

As a scholar of historical literature for my own PhD, I was well aware of the cultural utility of the text. I had also developed, during my PhD days, a pet hate of the archivist who projected too much of themselves onto their archival catalogue. Whilst I think all of us, as archivists, inject a little of ourselves into the catalogue descriptions, it was my belief that I needed to keep my own interest to a minimum, otherwise I would be writing a story, and I guess it harks back to what I said at the start, that I think my colleague would have catalogued the Guthrie collection differently. That alone tells me that when we start to describe archival records, that we are in fact engaging in an act of creative writing, by adding what might be classed as a historiographical layer onto the records. My favourite archival theorist, Eric Ketelaar, sums this up really well:

Slide 5: Ketelaar 1

“The archive reflects realities as perceived by the archivers.”

So if my description adds an interpretive layer, does this subtlety change their meaning and/or recreate the records. Ketelaar believes that the archivist

Slide 6: Ketelaar 2

“leaves fingerprints which are attributes to the archive’s infinite meaning.”

In terms of dealing with private, non-public, record collections, Thomas Schellenberg advocated in his 1965 publication that

Slide 7: Schellenberg

‘the principles and techniques now applied to public records may be applied also, with some modifications to private records.’

The creative process associated with literary archives however is a differentiating factor, which surely requires archivists to capture this process, it being a central and an integral component within the cultural identity of such archive collections. Indeed, archivists such as Catherine Hobbs and Judy Dicken both clearly assert that it is imperative to capture the author’s creative process within the arrangements and description of the records.

Slide 9: Guthrie's creativity

Guthrie, throughout his career, wrote a variety of talks and articles, underpinning his views on textual criticism, producing Shakespeare, the space in which Shakespeare was performed, etc. We have over 60 of these in the archive and they do reveal Guthrie's creativity, and this is something I had to capture as part of the archiving process.

So where does one begin? The cataloguing guidelines produced by the GLAM working party are a definitive stop on the cataloguing itinerary. However, for me at PRONI, they are made somewhat redundant due to the restrictions of our in-house policies and systems. And why is that, you may ask? Section 2.1 of the GLAM cataloguing guidelines state these Guidelines have been mapped to 22 of the 26 descriptive elements which underpin ISAD-G. To me, that is perfectly reasonable, except that PRONI's in-house cataloguing software only allows compliance with six of the ISAD-G elements. When you catalogue an item, this is the screen you have:

Slide 8: PCP item level entry shot

Immediately there is a gap between what is ultimately possible and what is practically feasible. Section 4.2 of the GLAM guidelines do however state that six is the minimal number of ISAD-G elements, and lists these as: Reference Code, Title, Creator, Dates, Extent of Unit of Description and Level of Description. In PRONI, the creator of the records is only distinguished if you use the author's name in the Fonds level title. Likewise, it is only this year that the word 'extent' has really appeared in policy wording at PRONI. When the Guthrie papers were catalogued, it was perfectly acceptable to say 'bundle of documents' or 'folder of letters,' whereas now you will see 'a folder of 20 letters.' One key element which, to me, is missing from PRONI's cataloguing system is 'Administrative/Biographical History' and there is not at present any space for this. There is a descriptive field associated with the Fonds level title, but very often, this is left blank.

Another key element which is missing from PRONI's cataloguing software is 'Archival History' and the related 'Immediate Source of Acquisition' is also missing, although there is a one line 'depositor' field at the Fonds level for 'internal use only.' The other key element, and the pertinent one for this paper, is 'System of Arrangement.'

As you can see, there are some fundamental gaps in PRONI's cataloguing capability. This in turn has a knock-on effect for the cultural utility of the archives, as part of structured research programmes, etc. It falls to the capabilities of the archivist therefore to include at least some of these 'missing' elements in the descriptive fields for the Fonds, Series, and Item level titles. The problem is that PRONI is probably the only publicly funded archival repository in the UK where you do not have to be a qualified archivist. Indeed, many of our archivists have no idea of ISAD-G and even less that PRONI doesn't really adhere to such standards. So, where does that leave the cataloguing of important collections, including literary ones? For literary papers, such as the Guthrie papers, this falls to the cataloguing archivist. So in this instance, it fell to me.

The Fonds level for this collection as a whole is D3585, the Annaghmakerrig Papers. The Tyrone Guthrie papers were not allowed to have their own Fonds level. So they have been catalogued as D3585/F. The first hurdle for any researcher to find them is to realise that they are not a distinct collection of papers on their own, and this had made them 'hidden' from researchers in PRONI.

Slide 9: online catalogue Fonds shot

Nobody in PRONI really understood much about Guthrie and so nobody really knew what was in the boxes. The records came to us 35 years after the death of Guthrie, in 1971, and in the intervening 35 years, many different people had viewed the papers, including Guthrie's biographer Forsyth in the mid 1970s. So the internal structure will never be known. The boxes which arrived in my office in 2010 were a jumble. I think there were about 70 boxes in total and the correspondence for example was split across about half of them. Guthrie was a prolific correspondent and there are over 60 folders of correspondence, each containing between 20-30 letters each, so 1500-200 letters in total. The correspondence formed the central thread of the archive, since it was the only document type present from 1906 (when Guthrie was 6 years old) to 1971 (written in the month before his death).

I had to take into account a number of factors inherent in the correspondence: the intertextuality of the different archival records and the fact that we had both the passive and active correspondence (i.e. letters written to and from Guthrie), the sheer level of correspondence and its internal complexity (i.e. one letter might talk about a new contract, a new play being written, a constructive criticism of his own work and family affairs) and all of these factors went firmly against any attempt for me to organise the letters by event, i.e. a group of letters regarding his performance of Hamlet, or a group of letters relating to a trip recently undertaken. I had originally wanted to follow his creativity, to put all the scripts, notes, photographs, letters, contracts, etc about Hamlet, for example, together, but this was proving far too complicated. Ultimately, the Guthrie collection is split by document type, and into the following sections: Literary Writings by Tyrone Guthrie which includes plays, scripts and books; Scripts written by others and submitted to Guthrie for his critique; Lady Guthrie's papers, from Judith, including her own script for Queen Bee; Photographs; Correspondence, which covers the period from 1906 to 1971; Printed Material which includes theatre programmes and journals; Family History papers and a section of Guthrie's papers which include the majority of his talks and lectures, articles he wrote for various publications, as well as early years material including his birth certificate and some school records, so the structure looks like this:

Slide 10: PCP Fonds structure for D3585/F

What worries me is that by splitting the archive by document type, and by not including all possible information, that something between archivist and reader will get lost in translation. I felt compelled to write a paragraph explaining my cataloguing decisions on the series level of D3585, i.e. D3585/F, the section of the Annaghmakerrig archive that deals with Guthrie. It reads:

Slide 11: PCP explanation

Unlike an official collection of perhaps government records or those of an institution, akin to other private collections, the Tyrone Guthrie archive had no apparent internal structure upon accession into PRONI, and so order and structure has been imposed onto the collection, so as to aid cataloguing and facilitate inclusion in finding aids. So, in the same way that an editor of a text might provide some editorial conventions for guidance to readers, I feel compelled to say that the collection has been split by document type although there are some instances such as 'printed ephemera' where press cuttings, copies of magazines and journals have all been put together.

It is not ideal but it's as much as I could do, without specific fields for Administrative or Archival History. It seems as though I was doing a 'whitewash' of a lifetime's creativity and action, to blend it seamlessly together in one archive.

Slide 12: Robert McGill Quote

The literary scholar, Robert McGill, writes that:

"The archive arranges a chaotic and disparate range of materials into a single, homogenous text under the auspices of a single authorial name."

But will the researchers of D3585/F appreciate the extent of the creative role I have played in the formation of the catalogue? I don't agree at all with Jenkinson's notion of archival neutrality. The Guthrie archive is a case in point. I also don't know if I've 'done right' by the archive. I mean, have I truly catalogued Guthrie's creative processes and thus portrayed the collection to reflect this? Catherine Hobbs writes about a 'creative archival turn' in which what she terms as 'authorial fallacy' would mean a trail of archival intervention being visible in the archive, almost like the meta-data that attaches itself to born digital records. Hobbs talks about doing so much cataloguing, and then leaving the archive hanging, so that researchers might engage with it how they wish. This idea of a 'suspended archive' is, to me, an attractive one. Almost like walking round the museum and seeing a small label which says 'reliquary' but not really knowing how significant it was, until we open up the guidebook and read that it once housed St Patrick's finger, for example.

The archive is both a source and a subject in its own right, and I don't know if archivists on a daily basis engage with that idea but I think if they did, they too would reflect upon their cataloguing practices a lot more. I read an

interesting book recently. 'The Boundaries of the Literary Archive' was published by Ashgate in September this year. It is an interesting volume in that the contributors are not just literary and textual scholars, but also archivists and archival theorists. The key difference in this volume is that the volume seems to concern itself with the cultural utility of the text, a notion which many archivists do not even think about in their day to day work. Indeed, many of my colleagues simply catalogue each item without thinking of the future of the document - who may order it, how it might be used. Indeed, they would ask me that surely that is beyond our professional boundary? But should we, as archivists, make more of a conscious effort to better understand this cultural utility and would this alter the way we organise and describe literary archives. I find all this really confusing, and perhaps this is due to my own history. I trained as a historian, specifically of literature and then retrained as an archivist, and I find myself often with a foot in both camps.

Heather MacNeil at the University of Toronto has recently supervised a doctoral thesis by Jennifer Lynn Douglas on 'Archiving Authors.' In this thesis, Jennifer argues for a shift, a shift away from Fonds and Provenance, and a move towards the archive becoming referent to the various individuals that live in the various creative processes and the internal 'textual landscapes' of author-archives. Jennifer believes we need to develop a more nuanced understanding of the processes that shape the archive and adopt a more candid descriptive practice to be adopted by archivists, who should also admit to their cataloguing as an act of creative historiography. One sentence for me struck a chord:

Slide 13: Jennifer Quote

'One of the first step. in the re-evaluation of creatorship was for archivists to consider their own complicity in archive creation..... the ways in which the archivist who acquires and processes an archive must also be viewed as a creator of that archive.'

Slide 14: Eastwood Quote

Others share her sentiment. Terry Eastwood has recently stated that **"the most important facet of arrangement is not physical but identifying archival relationships intellectually."**

Slide 15: Beattie quote

Heather Beattie argues for archival provenance to be expanded to take in political, social and technological factors. In her work on women's writing, she takes a diary as an example. She believes archivists should not only be concerned with mere provenance, but that we should - as a profession - engage in a more nuanced action which would recognise: **"the diarist's motivation for writing; the intended audience; the ... custodial history, and the role of the archivist in its representation."**

I found the cataloguing of the Tyrone Guthrie archive a real challenge, not only because it was complex and seemingly without any inherent order of its own, but more to do with the way it made me feel as an archivist, and how the archive made me question my own role in the formation and identity of the written historical record.

Slide 16: Promotion

The promotion of this archive too was complex. It is my belief that the archive would appeal to many different types of scholars, from those interested in theatrical directorship, or literary scholars interested in Guthrie as an author. But also, the history of publishing throughout the 20th century is laid out for consumption within the extensive number of journals in this collection. Those interested in stage design and audience participation would be interested in his research papers. There is also a huge international pull of this collection also, with Guthrie's involvement in the theatrical arenas of Australia, United States and Canada, to say a few.

Slide 17 – the end!

What is clear is that the archive is but a patchwork quilt of records which the archivists weave into some kind of sense and order. But in that sense and order, they create a narrative. Their own narrative. The archival story. A story that implicitly is never really told.