The National Archives

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Appraisal in practice

Caroline Williams

The National Archives (England, Wales & the UK)

Colloquium Presentation
School of Library, Archival and Information Studies
The University of British Columbia
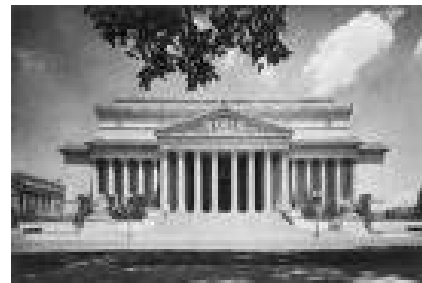Vancouver, BC, Canada

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Appraisal

- Theory, practice and appraisal
  - Literature
  - Methodologies
  - Adoption in practice
- National Archives as a case study
  - National Archives of the UK: conceptual or pragmatic?
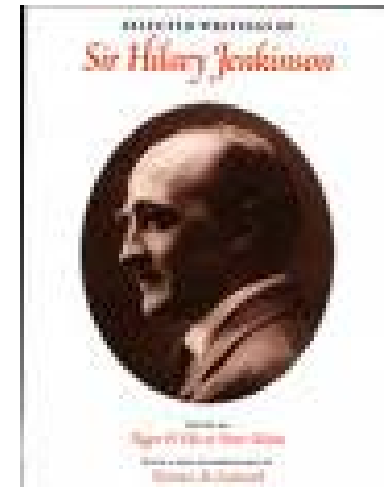 - Pre-1958; 1958-1998; 1998-2008
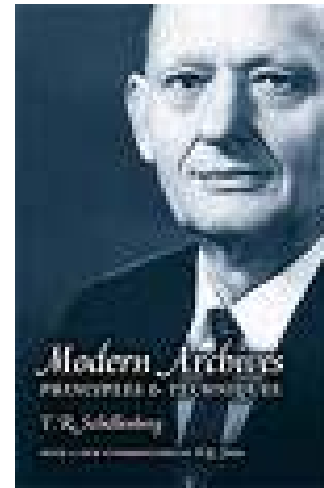- Current appraisal issues at TNA

Theory, practice and appraisal

- Literature
  - Reflective of context: Canada, Australia,UK

  - Recognised contributors to the field

  - Surfaces differences as well as similarities

Theory, practice and appraisal

- Methodologies
  - Archival
    - Documentation strategy
    - Macro appraisal and functional analysis
    - Pragmatic large scale approaches (Minnesota)
    - Schellenberg and Jenkinson
  - Current records: digital and continuum closing the gap?
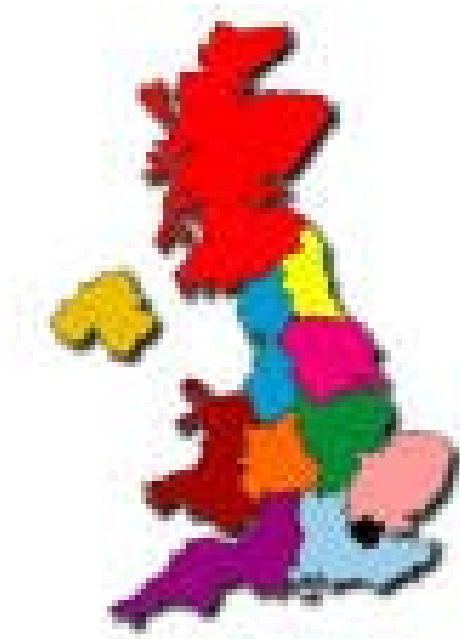

DIGITAL ARCHIVES

Adoption in practice: Canadian approach

- Survey of Canadian archivists 2003-5 (Craig)
  - 313/450 responses from individual archivists
  - Uncertainty about appropriate methodology
  - Ambivalent role of manager, in appraisal
  - Role of intuition
  - Ambivalent about publicising appraisal decisions

Adoption in practice: UK approach

- UK archival institutions 2003
  - Responses from 12 organisations
  - Purposes of appraisal
  - Limited existence of appraisal policies
  - Little conscious application of methodology

Practice makes perfect?

- Value of theory, methodology and practice
- 'Intelligent practice is not simply experience and intuition, but the difference between a trained and an untrained mind...'

The National Archives : conceptual or pragmatic?

- The National Archives of England, Wales and the United Kingdom (2005)

- Is a government department and executive agency of the Ministry of Justice

- Takes in the records of UK government departments and agencies, courts and tribunal – that's all

- Governed by the 1958 and 1967 Public Records Acts.

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- *Public Record Office (1838)*

- *Historical Manuscripts Commission (1869)*

- *Office of Public Sector Information OPSI (1786)*

The National Archives 1958-1998

- The context: post war; paper; strong administrative drivers; cultural aspect less pronounced
- Influences
  - Jenkinson
  - Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967
  - Record structure and function and govt policies
  - Reviews at 5 & 25 years
  - Bottom up – file by file
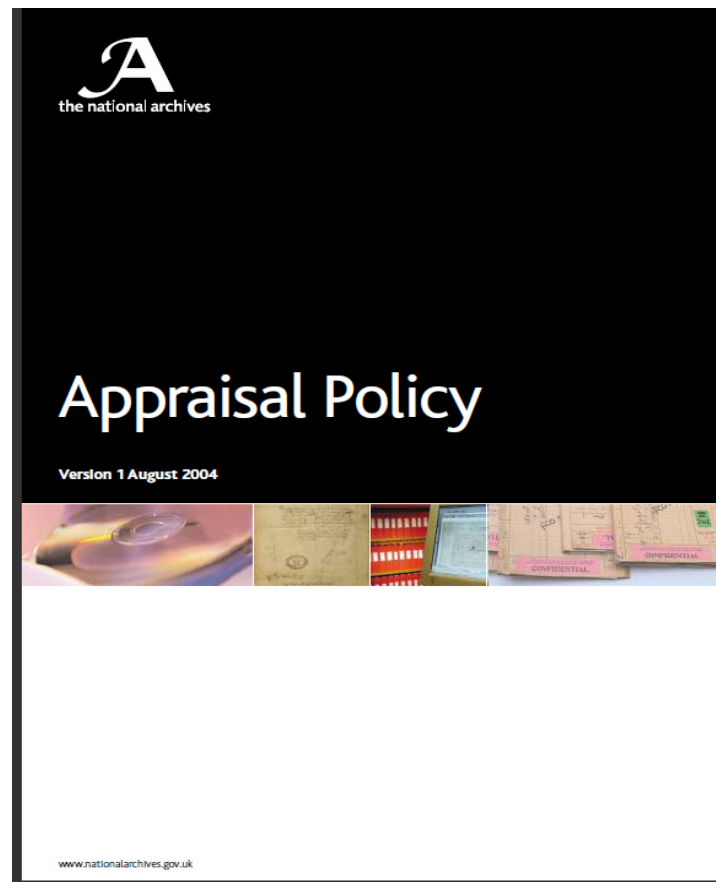 - Access 50 years reduced to 30 years *now 15….*

1998-2004

- Context: increasingly digital. New media and formats; appraisal values stuck in the 1950s
- Influences
  - Freedom of Information
  - Transparency & partnership
  - International developments especially macro-appraisal
- Developments
  - Acquisition and disposition policies – eight themes/functions
  - Operational Selection Policies

2004-2008

- Context
    - Acquisition Policy needed supporting guidance
    - Appraisal Policy – underlying concepts
- Influences
    - International – Macro appraisal & functional analysis
    - Digital & current needs
- Developments
    - Appraisal reports
    - Appraisal toolkits
- Thoughtful, if not innovative

What are we doing? Websites

- Government web archive launched 2003 – holds sites from 1996-7
- Appraised in line with 8 functions of government
- Debate as to whether a website is a record continues
- Current approaches: websites
  - Identified as archival in departments
  - Captured regularly three times a year
  - Event based harvesting (rapid response)
  - Themed collections
- Technical and archival dimensions
- Web harvesting alone not the right appraisal solution
- Web continuity – the persistence of links

What are we doing? Datasets

- 'Operational Selection Policy 30: Interaction of the State with the Citizen as documented in electronic case files & datasets'
- Macro-appraisal used as an aid to
  - Identify data sets and case files of potential archival value
  - Identify areas of overlap between departments to avoid duplication
- Value added to core data sets (decennial census)?
- Repeated and ongoing datasets – regular snapshots
- Dynamic datasets – work in progress
- GIS- the component parts (datasets, and base mapping) will be selected, so users to recreate the GIS for themselves

Collections strategies

- What?
  - Who's ensuring that key events, themes will be recorded?
  - Nuclear? Climate change? 2012?
- How will it help?
  - Identifies interested parties and supports the development of infrastructure

Current appraisal issues for TNA

1. What *is* a record? The 'What to Keep' project
2. 'Information' matters too
3. Systems needing integrated attention:
    i.   Datasets; case systems
    ii. Websites; intranets
    iii. Web 2.0 applications: wikis, blogs
4. EDRMS do not solve everything
5. One size does not fit all
6. The 'end-user' problem
7. Technology changes faster than we can keep up

Thank you.

caroline.williams@nationalarchives.gov.uk