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# Metadata and archival discoverability: driving use of the Philip Mackie collection at Southampton Solent University

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This descriptive paper aims to focus on the role of metadata for archival discoverability, highlighting a project the authors completed in 2023 at Southampton Solent University Library to describe the Philip Mackie Collection, a collection that had long lacked proper archival description. The authors explain the motivation for the project and discuss the rationale behind key decisions, such as which systems to use and who should create the descriptions. Ultimately, the authors decided to create the descriptions themselves, and thus the authors are able to describe their experience as bibliographic cataloguers adapting to archival standards (specifically ISAD(G) and EAD). On completion of this project, the library witnessed an increase in usage of the Mackie Collection. It is hoped that by describing some of the issues this project faced and highlighting its positive impact, we can encourage others to attempt similar projects and provide a (necessarily loose) framework for them to follow.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The aims of this project were to describe the collection according to archival standards; encode the description in a format that facilitates portability; where feasible, use URIs for entities in the description; publish the description online in a user-friendly format; publish the description in an archival discovery space; attain good visibility in search engine results. The major steps or decisions that the authors took to achieve these aims can be enumerated as follows: research archival theory and practice, especially in relation to description; select software for creating archival descriptions; decide who should create the descriptions; and choose spaces for publishing the descriptions.

**Findings** – In conclusion, it is clear that describing the collection according to archival standards and publishing it in Archives Hub have had a major impact on the usage of this collection. This is likely to be because of Archive Hub's prominent presence in search engine results and its status as one of the major shared archival discovery spaces for the UK. Bearing in mind that the collection was already catalogued (for the most part), the increased usage provides evidence not only of the value of metadata itself but specifically of the importance of appropriately structured metadata exposed in appropriate locations. The collection's old MARC records had only a minimal presence in search engine results, and so effectively our cataloguing was confined to the silo of library catalogues. It was bad enough being in a silo, but our records were not even in the right silo: they were archival records in a library catalogue. This failing has now been corrected.

**Research limitations/implications** – As an outcome of this work, the overall usage of the archive has improved.

**Originality/value** – The collection itself is unique to Southampton Solent University, and the process is informed by several standards and best practices.

**Keywords** Metadata, Archival discovery, Archives cataloguing, Encoded archival description, ISAD(G), Philip Mackie archive

**Paper type** Case study

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## Introduction

This paper describes part of an ongoing programme of work to drive use of Southampton Solent University (SSU) Library's archival collections, specifically a project to produce and publish a full archival description of the Philip Mackie collection – the archive of the writer Philip Mackie, a major figure in UK television during the second half of the 20th century. We conceive the primary audience for this paper to be librarians (or other non-archivists) at institutions that hold archival collections but do not use a professional archivist and have only limited archival infrastructure. A review of published literature has not revealed any other paper that describes the experience of librarians undertaking an archival description project [1], and we hope that by setting out the steps we took, discussing some of the issues we faced and highlighting the positive impact the project has had, we can encourage others to consider similar projects and provide a framework for them to follow. We acknowledge, however, that this framework can only be a loose one; the specific approaches that should be taken will depend on the nature of the collection and the institutional context (if not other factors as well) and so could vary considerably between institutions.

We begin by describing the state of affairs before this programme of work began and the rationale for our cataloguing project. We then outline the key steps or decisions in our project and proceed to discuss each of them in more detail, in particular by drawing attention to some of the salient differences between archival description and bibliographic cataloguing. Finally, we describe the impact of the project and draw some conclusions about the value of appropriately formatted and located metadata.

## Background: SSU library archival collections

SSU Library holds just two archival collections, both relating to major figures in UK film and television: the papers of the writer Philip Mackie and a smaller collection from the director Ken Russell. Both collections were donated in the past 20 years and are managed by librarians; there is no archivist on our staff.

As a flamboyant and often controversial film director, Ken Russell is much better known than Philip Mackie, and it is therefore understandable that SSU Library's efforts to promote our archives had often focused on the Ken Russell collection. Consisting mainly of "word-of-mouth" promotion to academics with interests in film and Russell in particular, these efforts have been successful, at least to the extent that we would expect scholars interested in Russell to know about our collection – it is mentioned in Melia (2023, p. 8), for example – and our archives have occasionally been consulted by researchers producing biographical or critical studies on Russell.

By contrast, we are not aware of the Mackie collection ever having been consulted. Notwithstanding the different levels of celebrity attendant on Russell and Mackie, it seemed that the Mackie collection was underused. Whereas the Russell collection represents only a fraction of Russell's output – materials relating to his works are dispersed across several institutions, and a great deal of valuable material was lost in a fire at Russell's home in 2006 (Melia, 2023, p. 8) – the Mackie collection is a full professional archive. It measures 12 m, and contains several thousand items, mainly draft scripts, notes and letters relating to Mackie's various TV and literary projects. And while Mackie is not a household name, he was undoubtedly a very successful writer and well-known within the industry, as evidenced by the sheer number of his credits on internet movie database (IMDB) [2].

We were convinced of the potential research value of the Mackie collection and that it would be used if it were better known. It was the Mackie collection, then, that was the original driver for this project, and it is from this that the examples in this paper will be drawn, although we have, in fact, subsequently applied the same approach to the Russell collection.

**Project outline and methodology**

While a programme to increase use of an archival collection will have several facets, a foundational element should be to ensure that it has good quality metadata exposed in the right places. After all, metadata is central to information organisation, effective discovery, retrieval, access and use (Haynes, 2018; Gartner, 2016; Zeng and Qin, 2016). And so, absent or inadequate metadata can render valuable resources invisible to users, hindering discoverability and, subsequently, access and usage.

The Mackie collection had undergone some cataloguing shortly after its donation, but the approach taken, no doubt because of limited resources, was to create a MARC record for groups of related items, treating each group like an independent bibliographic resource. Although MARC records are often used for describing archival materials at the collection level (Hunter, 2020, pp. 116–117), they are not well suited for full hierarchical archival description; MARC records themselves tend to impose a flat structure, and there are no efficient ways to represent relationships between records (Miller, 2000; Tenant, 2002). In the bibliographic world, this flat structure is not ideal, but manageable [3]; for archival collections, it can obfuscate the nature of the collection.

A further problem was that the records were surfaced in the SSU Library catalogue, which is mainly used by Solent staff and students, and so the records were not likely to be found by external users. In the year or two before this project began, the reach of these records would have expanded a little, as records from our library management system, ExLibris' Alma, can be exposed in search engines [4], and all records from our catalogue were shared with the UK's union catalogue, Library Hub Discover. But while this gave our records a bit more exposure, they were still results in (or from) a *library*, as opposed to an *archival*, discovery space.

We decided, therefore, that the first stage in our programme to drive use of the Mackie collection should be a project to describe the collection according to archival standards and to publish that description in places appropriate for an archival collection. The aims of this project were to:

- describe the collection according to archival standards;
- encode the description in a format that facilitates portability;
- where feasible use, URIs for entities in the description;
- publish the description online in a user-friendly format;
- publish the description in an archival discovery space; and
- attain good visibility in search engine results.

The major steps or decisions that we took to achieve these aims can be enumerated as follows:

- research archival theory and practice, especially in relation to description;
- select software for creating archival descriptions;
- decide who should create the descriptions; and
- choose spaces for publishing the descriptions.

It will be immediately obvious that these decisions are neither independent nor diachronic. It is likely, for example, that the same software used to create descriptions can be used to publish them. And if you choose to hire a professional archivist to create the descriptions, then it would be sensible to consult the archivist, at the very least, about the other decisions.

But some sort of analysis of the process is useful, and these four points will be used to structure the following description of our project.

**Literature review of archival theory and practice**

As general introductions, the textbooks of Williams (2006), Millar (2017) and Hunter (2020) provide comprehensive reviews of the theory and practice of archival management. Hunter (2020, p. 2) identifies three core functions of archives: identifying records of enduring value, preservation and making them available to users, and these are achieved by a range of processes, such as those outlined by Williams (2006, p. 19):

- acquisition, selection and appraisal;
- arrangement and description;
- provision of access and reference services;
- storage and maintenance of archives;
- preservation and conservation; and
- advocacy and outreach.

Both Williams (2006, pp. 23–24) and Hunter (2020, pp. 4–5) review the key differences between libraries and archives. While materials collected by libraries tend to be published, archival materials are usually unpublished and often unique. Consequently, library collections are usually available on open shelves and may be borrowed by users, while archival materials are held in closed stacks and not circulated. Library materials tend to be discrete resources that are published, purchased and processed individually, and whose significance is largely independent of other items. By contrast, archival materials tend to be groups of related items that gain significance from their relationships to other items in the group (Williams, 2006, p. 74; Hunter, 2020, pp. 4–5). It appears to be this consideration that lies behind some of the key differences between archival arrangement and description and bibliographic cataloguing and classification.

Because the significance of archival materials often stems from their context – including the individuals, groups, functions and processes that produced them – archival theory places great importance on the arrangement of an archive, which can reveal that context. There are two basic principles of arrangement: provenance and original order. The principle of provenance dictates that the records of a given creator, whether individual or organisation, should not be intermingled with records of another creator (Williams, 2006, pp. 75–77; Meissner, 2019, pp. 17–22; Hunter, 2020, pp. 95–96). The principle of original order dictates that records should be kept in the order that their creator used them (Williams, 2006, pp. 77–78; Meissner, 2019, pp. 22–26; Hunter, 2020, p. 96). This method preserves the context of the records' creation, which can be crucial for their historical, cultural and legal significance. However, the original order may not always be easy to determine, and there can sometimes be a tension between preserving the original order and finding the most useful arrangement for a collection (Boles, 1982), especially in a digital environment where a single fixed order is no longer necessary (Meissner, 2019, pp. 144–146). Furthermore, Meissner (2019, p. 25) suggests that the principle of original order should be limited:

> [Original order] does not really apply to the arrangement of myriad items within folders, files, and other low-level groupings of records. Rather, it focuses on identifying the major groupings within a collection and keeping them intact and organized in relation to each other.

Similarly, the hierarchical nature of archival description reflects the fact that archival materials are aggregates and that the context of an individual item is important for

understanding its significance. While hierarchical principles are prominent in cataloguing models and widely understood by cataloguers [5], these still tend to be somewhat suppressed in the practical business of creating a MARC record, and normally books can be catalogued without reference to other books in the library.

Despite these fundamental differences between bibliographic cataloguing and archival description, there is also evidence in the archival literature of similarities. Santamaria (2015, p. 35) recommends that archivists bear in mind the FISO user tasks when describing archives [6], and archivists often use bibliographic controlled vocabularies, such as Library of Congress Name Authority File and the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH), in their descriptions (Williams, 2006, p. 111, Meissner, 2019, pp. 54–56).

In 2005 Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner introduced the principle of More Product, Less Process (MPLP), which has become a hugely influential and also controversial approach in archival processing. MPLP addressed a persistent issue of processing backlogs in archival collections. Their research highlighted that traditional, meticulous processing methods often lead to significant delays in making collections accessible, which is ultimately very unhelpful to users. MPLP advocates for a pragmatic approach, focusing on essential tasks to expedite access to collections, particularly large contemporary ones. By challenging the necessity of exhaustive preservation and detailed arrangement activities, MPLP encourages archivists to prioritise user access and administrative efficiency.

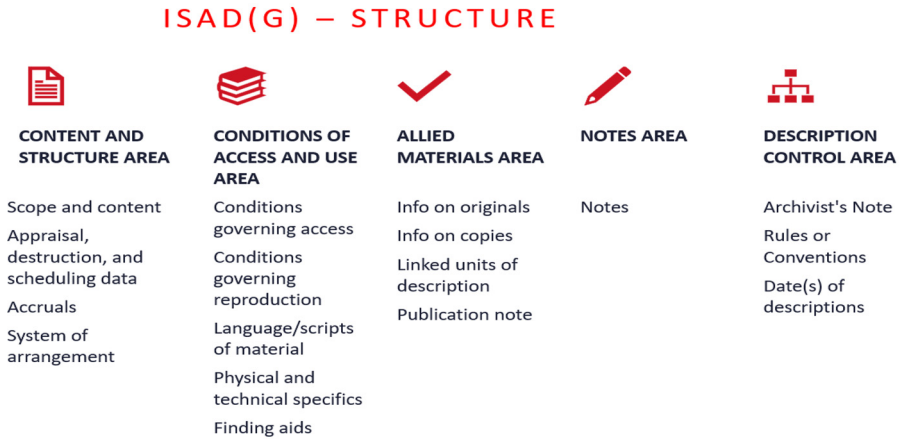
While MPLP has not been universally accepted [7], it has been very influential. Santamaria (2015) describes the concept of extensible processing, which builds on MPLP. The essence of extensible processing is to eliminate backlogs by doing basic processing – for example, in respect of description, this might be to publish collection-level descriptions – on all collections, then to let usage dictate where resources are allocated for fuller processing.

*ISAD(G)*

Standards are foundational to archival description, enabling consistency and fostering interoperability across institutions (Millar, 2017, p. 103; Meissner, 2019, p. 41; Hunter, 2020, p. 116). While there are many archival description standards, the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) is perhaps the most widely adopted [8]. It is a metadata standard defining 26 data elements primarily focused on description and aiding in finding tools (see Figure 1 below for some of the elements). Its mandatory elements include reference code, title, creator, date(s), extent of the unit of description and level of description. It provides guidelines for creating descriptions of archival contents, offering specifications and recommendations on mandatory and non-mandatory elements, as well as how to record values to those elements (ICA, 2000). This international standardisation fosters consistency across various archives, enabling integration and interoperability.

The purposes of ISAD(G) are multifaceted, aiming to ensure consistency, facilitate information retrieval and exchange, enable sharing of authority data and integrate descriptions into unified information systems. Based on the concept of multi-level description and “respect des fonds”, ISAD(G) organises information from general to specific, emphasises relevant details for each level, links descriptions and avoids repetition of information (ICA, 2000). In other words, the hierarchical nature of archival collections is reflected in a hierarchical standard of description. ISAD(G) uses the following levels of archival arrangement (ICA, 2000; Williams, 2006, pp. 79–81):

- Fonds: This is the top level of arrangement, referring to an entire set of records collected for a given entity or purpose.
- Sub-fonds: A subdivision of the fonds.




**Source(s):** Figure by authors based on textual descriptions from ISA, 2000, pp. 22–35, retrieved from https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/289619f2-b151-4e5b-a4d5-d259b62208ff/content, accessed on 03 September 2023)

**Figure 1.** Summary of ISAD(G)

- Series: Further subdivisions based on some form of grouping.
- Sub-series – a further division of a series of records.
- File – a collection of items organised as a unit within a given series of records.
- Item: The smallest unit in an archival collection, such as a single letter or photograph.

*Encoded archival description*

Encoded archival description (EAD) is an encoding standard for the description of archival materials. It originated from a project initiated at the University of California Library in Berkeley, but currently the Library of Congress is its maintenance and developer agency. EAD version 3 was published in 2015, but the earlier version (EAD, 2002) is still used. EAD is an XML-based schema aimed at supporting finding aids. Being an XML standard, it requires applications or CSS to feed the data into finding aids, i.e. to make it human-readable. EAD has over 150 metadata elements, and it facilitates the creation of inventories, registers and indexes by archives, libraries, museums and manuscript repositories, aligning with ISAD(G) (Meissner, 2019, pp. 50–51).

Key features of EAD include (Pitti, 1999; Hunter, 2020, pp. 117–119):

(1) Hierarchical navigation:
   - EAD finding aids offer hierarchical navigation, enabling exploration of collections at different depths.
   - This hierarchy reflects the physical arrangement of collections, assisting in navigating intricate holdings.

(2) Standardisation and consistency:
   - EAD standardises the presentation of archival descriptions across various institutions and platforms.

- Provides a consistent structure and encoding, which enhances interaction with archival collections, irrespective of where they are hosted.

(3) Interoperability and portability

- Standardisation means that descriptions can be re-used in different systems with minimal effort.
- Structured data means that descriptions can be transformed relatively easily.

**Systems for creating descriptions**

One important decision we faced was what system to use to create the descriptions. There are both commercial and open-source archival content management systems (CMS) that can be used for this (and that can do a lot more as well), and most such systems support EAD. Institutions such as national archives or professional bodies for archivists will often be able to provide information about what is available [9]. Undoubtedly there are advantages to having access to a sophisticated archival system, but even open-source systems will incur costs (in staff time to configure and maintain the servers, for example), and when archival holdings are small and new accessions are rare, there may not be a business case for their implementation.

In the absence of a CMS, it would be possible to use template documents (including spreadsheets) or HTML forms (either on the desktop or on a web server) to make the creation of EAD easier, perhaps, by not presenting any XML to the user but adding it in automatically through some back-end scripting [10]. But as Meissner (2019, p. 52) suggests, a simple XML editor can also be used to create EAD descriptions if alternatives are not available [11].

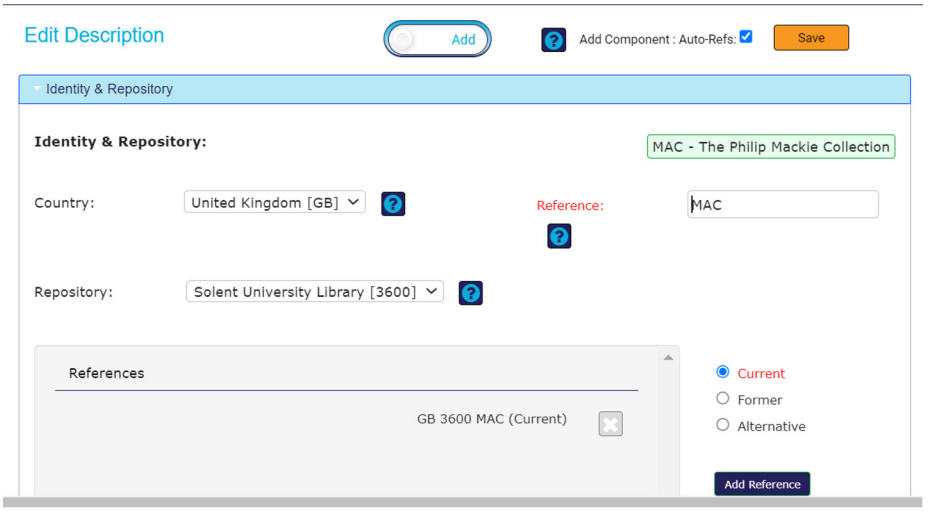
We were very fortunate that the system problem was entirely solved for us by the Archives Hub. This is an aggregator for UK archival collections developed and maintained by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). As well as giving us a public interface for our archival collection (see further below), Archives Hub provided an EAD editor, now unfortunately discontinued because of security concerns [12], which made the creation of descriptions much more efficient.

The Archives Hub Editor used EAD (version 2002) as its foundational format, abstracting away the underlying XML complexity. The subsequent sections outline our approach to describing collections using the editor and EAD, with EAD fragments presented as code snippets. Use of the Archives Hub Editor to create EAD facilitated efficient description workflows.

As depicted in Figure 2, at the top level, adhering to the ISAD(G) metadata elements, the Identity Statement primarily includes reference codes such as the country code, repository code and any other unique identifiers. Additionally, relevant details about the institution and collection are provided: the institution name; its code assigned by the UK's National Archives (GB-3600); the collection code (MAC); the top-level collection name (The Philip Mackie Collection); and its status (current, former, or alternative).

The identity statement and repository information given above is a mandatory description. Once these descriptions are created at a collection level, there is no need to repeat them at the lower hierarchical levels such as fonds, sub-fonds, series, file or item. One of the benefits of hierarchical levels of descriptions is that it avoids unnecessary duplication of data.

While descriptions are made using the graphical user interface (GUI) editor, EAD tags are generated in the background; see, for example, a code extract below (Figure 3) about the identity and repository information.




**Source(s):** Screenshot by authors using a software tool Jisc EAD Editor. Jisc, 2023, accessed on 03 September 2023 - note that the EAD descriptions were created by the authors using Jisc EAD Editor – which is now retired due to software security concerns)

**Figure 2.** Identity statement based on ISAD(G)

The EAD descriptions are displayed for users as finding aids in a searchable format, with a table of contents (see Figure 4), for the various works of the Philip Mackie collection on the Archives Hub website.

## Creating descriptions

*Who should create descriptions?*

Another key decision we faced was who should create the descriptions. One option was to hire a project archivist, someone with a firm grounding in archival principles and practice who could ensure that useful descriptions are produced. A professional archivist could also advise on other aspects of the project (and indeed the whole programme to drive use) and foster links with the wider archival community. For institutions with access to the funds required, or with a collection that is likely to attract grant money, this may well be the best option.

However, at SSU we chose an alternative approach – to create the descriptions ourselves. One reason for this is that we thought we were unlikely to obtain funding for a project archivist. While we were confident that the Mackie collection would be used if it were more widely known, in our judgement, it was unlikely to attract funding via a grant application, where competing collections would probably be considered of greater historical importance or contemporary interest. After all, having had no known consultations of the collection, we had no hard evidence of interest in the collection. Furthermore, we were in a relatively good position to attempt to create the descriptions internally; we had the capacity to divert some staff time from bibliographic cataloguing duties. Naturally, we took steps to educate ourselves in the theory and practice of archival description. In addition to the formally

```
▼<ead>
 ▼<eadheader countryencoding="iso3166-1" dateencoding="iso8601" langencoding="iso639-2b" repositoryencoding="archon">
    <eadid countrycode="GB" mainagencycode="3600" identifier="gb3600-mac">gb3600-mac</eadid>
   ▼<filedesc>
    ▼<titlestmt>
       <titleproper>The Philip Mackie Collection</titleproper>
     </titlestmt>
   </filedesc>
  ▼<profiledesc>
    ▼<creation>
       Created by Solent University Library (Solent University Library) using the Archives Hub Editor
       <date>2022-07-26</date>
     </creation>
   </profiledesc>
  ▼<revisiondesc>
    ▼<change>
       <date>2022-12-09</date>
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     </change>
    ▼<change>
       <date>2023-05-18</date>
       <item>Last revision by Solent University Library (Solent University Library) using the Archives Hub Editor</item>
     </change>
   </revisiondesc>
 </eadheader>
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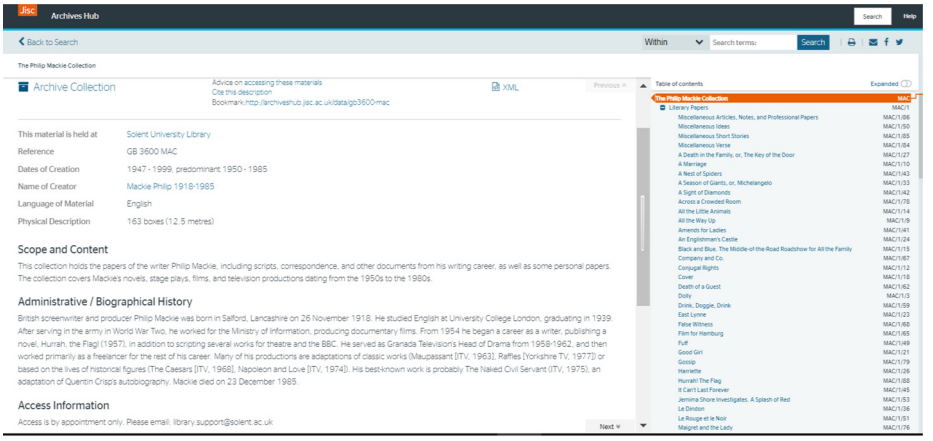
**Source(s):** Screenshot by authors using a software tool Jisc EAD Editor. Jisc, 2024, accessed on 03 September 2023 – note that the EAD descriptions were created by the authors using Jisc EAD Editor – which is now retired due to software security concerns)

**Figure 3.** EAD/XML code snippet – showing top-level description of collection




**Source(s):** Archives Hub, 2025, retrieved from http://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb3600-mac, accessed on 25th March 2025 – note that the Archives Hub descriptions referenced here was created and maintained by the authors and hosted on Jisc Archives Hub)

**Figure 4.** The Philip Mackie collection on Archives Hub

published literature, such as that cited throughout this paper, we also made use of many of the guides and tutorials aimed at non-archivists, such as those that The National Archives (of the UK) have collated [13]. Of course we remained conscious of our shortcomings at creating archival descriptions, not least our lack of experience, but we consider our pragmatic approach justifiable given the context.

Institutions that have neither staff time nor access to funds to undertake a larger hierarchical description project might still be able to increase awareness of their collections through the creation and publication of collection-level descriptions, which could be expanded later if future resources allow, especially if interest shown in the collection justifies an increase in resources devoted to the collections, as recommended by Santamaria (2015). Such approaches are now widely advocated in the archival literature, especially since the publication of Greene and Meissner's (2005) influential, and somewhat controversial, article introducing the concept of MPLP.

At SSU Library the archival collections are small, and we were able to dedicate enough staff time to give them relatively full descriptions. We did not, therefore, face the problems that MPLP was intended to address. In underlying philosophy, however, we think that our pragmatic approach to making the collections accessible aligns with the MPLP principle, in as much as it prioritises user access over rigid adherence to exhaustive. And, as Meissner (2019, pp. 148–150) himself emphasises, it is the broad approach and general mindset of MPLP that is its essence. By doing so, we ensure that our collections are available to users without unnecessary delays while still maintaining a sound level of organisation and description according to archival standards.

*Our experience creating descriptions*

As discussed in our literature review above, there are many differences between archival arrangement and description and bibliographic cataloguing and classification. In this section we pick out some salient differences that we encountered, though these observations are deliberately anecdotal and not intended to be comprehensive.

*Arrangement of the collection.* Before even getting to the description, we faced the question of how to arrange the Mackie collection. As described above, a key principle of archival arrangement is original order. As Williams (2006, p. 77) states, "the principle of original order requires that records should be maintained in the same order as they were in while in active use." However, the value of this approach for personal archives (such as we have) has been questioned by Meehan (2010), and it is not easy to implement if, for example, previous custodians have altered the original order (Hunter, 2020, p. 96). In the case of the Mackie collection, we had no records to indicate whether our predecessors at SSU Library had altered the original order of the collection, but we decided to keep the physical order that we had, both because of the principle of original order (assuming that is what we had) and also because that represented the most efficient way to approach the task. It did mean that items relating to a single Mackie work were scattered about the collection in many cases, but this is tolerable. It would also have been unavoidable, because the collection contains some material, e.g. letters to TV producers, where several different works are discussed in a single sheet; it is obviously impossible for such letters to be arranged alongside each work that they discuss. We mitigated this problem by grouping these items together in our intellectual, as opposed to physical, arrangement, i.e. in our descriptions, as recommended in the archival literature (Greene and Meissner, 2005, pp. 240–243; Santamaria, 2015, p. 9; Meissner, 2019, pp. 24–25).

*Specific elements – title.* Unlike in bibliographic cataloguing, where the title generally must be derived from a source of information on the work, in archival cataloguing the title is generated by the cataloguer. In our case this meant that we adopted the commonly known

title of the work if published or produced, or a sensible title based on the documents themselves if unpublished. For example, we used the title "Cover" for Mackie's scripts that eventually became used for his 1981 TV series "Cover", even though that name does not appear on the items themselves (the series was originally called "Victims").

*Specific elements – creator.* Recording archival authorship is not always straightforward especially when one work is a derivative of another or when such information is not easily discernible from the source. ISAD(G) defines a "creator" as the entity responsible for creating, accumulating and maintaining records (ICA, 2000). However, Douglas (2018) notes that different standards use diverse metadata elements, such as creator, "owned by," "held by," "authored by," "associated with," "collected by," "created by," or "written by," to record a statement of authorship by one or multiple agents.

Creator is the person, agency, or entity that produced the archival material. Based on ISAD(G) and EAD standards, the Creator element encompasses the individuals or organisations responsible for creating the original records described within the archival collection. An interesting feature of EAD is that it allows you to add an authorised identifier for a person (or any controlled access point) from any source. So, while we used the LC authority file [via The Virtual International Authority File (VIAF)] for many of our personal names, we could also add IMDB and Wikidata identifiers when a VIAF ID was not available (see Figure 5 below).

Mackie frequently adapted literary works for TV, and one quandary we had was what to do with creators of the original works. Had we been doing bibliographic cataloguing of DVDs of these TV series, then we would not have hesitated to put the original author in a MARC 700 field, with a relationship designator to indicate that they were the author of the original work. This makes sense if we think about what a user is likely to want to find. For example, a user searching a library catalogue for works by the Elizabethan dramatist Thomas Middleton may well be interested to see that the library holds a recording of Mackie's adaptation of one of his plays. However, this does not necessarily translate to the archival context. A user searching for archival material relating to Thomas Middleton is less likely to be interested in seeing that Solent has scripts and letters relating to a TV adaptation. For this reason, we decided to omit such names from our controlled access points, but we acknowledge that it is a highly subjective judgement, and one we might wish to reconsider in the future [14].

In reference to this, it is interesting to note that while relationship designators are now a well-established part of bibliographic cataloguing, there is some debate still in the archival community about how relationships should best be encoded (Society of American Archivists, 2019) [15]:

> TS-EAD could not reach a consensus regarding the inclusion of <relations>. Some members felt strongly that including <relations> was essential in order to support rich Linked Open Data applications, align with EAC-CPF, and acknowledge draft guidelines on relationships in archival description published by the ICA Committee on Best Practices and Standards. Others felt that it duplicated functionality present in <controlaccess> and other existing elements, added unnecessary complexity, and that incorporating robust support for Linked Open Data was premature. (Society of American Archivists, 2019)

As well as controlled access points, the administrative or biographical history element complements the creator by offering contextual information about the life, work or administrative processes of the individuals or organisations associated with the archival unit. This includes significant details such as life histories, corporate origins or administrative procedures to aid interpretation and understanding (Meissner, 2019, pp. 58–60).

*Wikidata.* If we were cataloguing a book about one of Philip Mackie's works, then we would look to create a LCSH authority record for that work as a controlled access point.


**Source(s):** Screenshot by authors using a software tool Jisc EAD Editor. Jisc, 2024, accessed on 03 September 2023 – note that the EAD descriptions were created by the authors using Jisc EAD Editor – which is now retired due to software security concerns). Note the IMDB identifying number used for the bottom entry

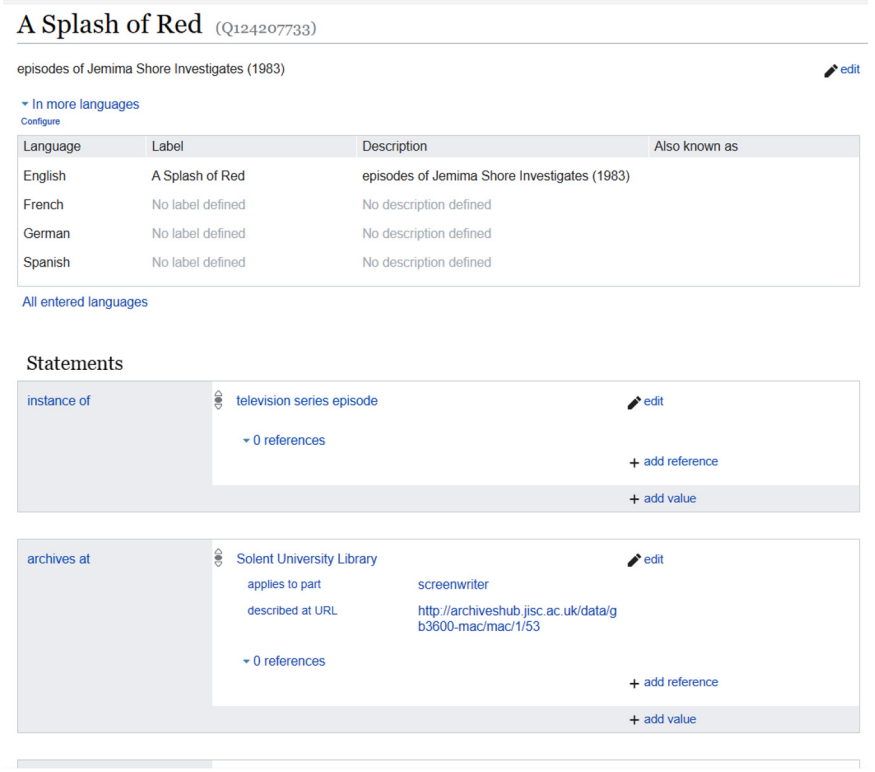
**Figure 5.** EAD creator element

When describing Mackie's notes or letters about his various works, we were reluctant to rely on LCSH as the authority file for these works: we doubted whether our archival collection constituted sufficient warrant for creating an LCSH authority record, and we would not expect many, if any, of the headings we created to be reused in bibliographic records. We instead decided to use Wikidata as a resource for creating controlled identifiers (i.e. URIs) for those works, individuals and organisations that we wanted to add as subjects or creators in our archival descriptions but for which there was not a pre-existing LCSH, VIAF or IMDB entity. As well as allowing us to create an item, and thus generate a URI, for an entity very quickly, Wikidata allows us an easy way to connect our archival descriptions to a network of Linked Data that could further boost discovery, both now and especially in the future, as we expect Linked Data to become more fundamental in search and discovery [16]. Through leveraging the *archivesat* property of Wikidata, we established a link from Wikidata to the Solent Archives hosted on the JISC Archives Hub (see Figure 6).

Figure 7 shows a visualisation of Mackie's works on Wikidata.

**Publishing descriptions**

Publishing descriptions online makes it easier for researchers to access the descriptions and assess whether your holdings are worth consulting. But metadata for the Mackie collection, in the form of the MARC records for groups of items, had been online for over ten years. A researcher who knew about the Mackie collection would have been able to find these records

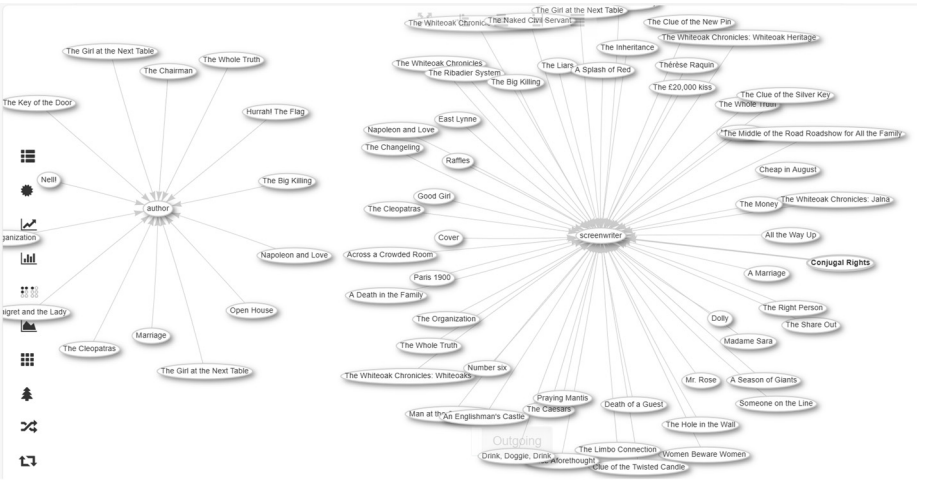



**Source(s):** Wikidata, 2025, accessed on 9th January 2025 – note that the Wikidata entry itself is created and maintained by the authors. CC BY license)

**Figure 6.** ArchivesAt Property in Wikidata linking to Solent archives on JISC Archives Hub (https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q124207733

in our library catalogue and could probably have put together an acceptable picture of what the collection was like [17]. What we wanted to do with this project was to make our descriptions more discoverable to those who did not know about the collection [18]. Specifically, we sought to surface our descriptions in archival discovery spaces and prominently in the results of internet search engines.

We were able to use the Archives Hub platform to meet both these aims. Archives Hub holds descriptions of the collection of around 400 UK archives. All these descriptions can be searched via a single interface, and it also facilitates discovery by highlighting collections and topics on its webpages [19]. Descriptions in Archives Hub have good prominence in search engine results, something which is easier for a long-established system run by a major organisation (in this case, JISC) to achieve. Archives Hub's use of URIs for specific entities (e.g. VIAF identifiers for people) is also geared towards improving the discoverability of its collections (Stevenson, 2020). Collaborative systems, such as Archives Hub, that allow archives to reap the benefits of increased discoverability and economies of scale (Meissner, 2019, p. 124), are not




**Source(s):** Created at https://w.wiki/CtWH; Wikidata, 2025, accessed on 9th January 2025 – note that the Wikidata entries referenced here were created and maintained by the authors. CC BY license)

**Figure 7.** Graph of Mackie's works on Wikidata

uncommon; they tend to have a regional basis, and we would recommend participating in such a scheme if possible [20].

A benefit of having descriptions in a standardised reusable format such as EAD is that the descriptions can be transferred and shared with minimal effort. And so, while we used the same system, Archives Hub, both to create and publish our descriptions, this is not the only way to do it. If we had created EAD descriptions in a local system, we could easily have loaded these into Archives Hub.

By the same token, we are able to take our descriptions out of Archives Hub and transfer them elsewhere with ease. One application of this has been to put the descriptions at the sub-series level into our library catalogue, thereby replacing the old, incomplete and much briefer MARC records. This may seem odd, given that the criticisms we had of the older records – that they flatten the archival hierarchy and that they are not discoverable outside of the library catalogue – can be applied to these imported records too. But our reason for including these records in the catalogue was so that when the collection was promoted to students, they could find records of a type that they are familiar with (title-level records, e.g. for a particular film) in a system that they know and regularly use. These records would be unsatisfactory if they were the *only* metadata that existed for the Mackie collection, but as an *adjunct* to the full descriptions, they serve a purpose. It is relevant too that they required very little effort to create, because of the structured nature of our existing EAD descriptions – a simple script was written to automate the conversion to records that could be imported into our Primo VE catalogue [21].

## Impact and conclusions

The impact of the publication of our descriptions has been very pleasing. Since the project's completion, we have had visits from a lecturer at a UK university, sent scans to Ohio and New Zealand and hosted an undergraduate from Linnaeus University in Sweden, who also

gave us our first research product, her undergraduate dissertation (Nilsson, 2023), which draws heavily on our archival collection. In isolation, four users in a little under two years might not seem especially impressive, but this collection had no known user in the previous 16 years since donation. It is also worth stressing the wide reach that the Mackie collection now has. The spread of our users is noticeably international, but it is also cross-disciplinary (one of our researchers was not interested in television studies *per se*, but in depictions of the Napoleonic era) and even extends beyond the academy, as one of our researchers was a professional theatre director. It is hard to imagine such a broad reach being achieved without the collection being easily discoverable online.

We would emphasise that not all online presences are equally discoverable. Prior to this project, the Mackie collection had an online presence: SSU Library had maintained a webpage about the Mackie collection for at least five years, and MARC records for the collection had been in the online catalogue for over ten years and published to search engines for four years. Yet the Mackie collection had received no use during this time. It is likely that even collections with full archival descriptions published online would be made more discoverable if their descriptions were added to appropriate shared archival discovery spaces, such as Archives Hub. Doing so could greatly broaden the reach of these collections.

In conclusion, it is clear that describing the collection according to archival standards and publishing it in Archives Hub has had a major impact on the usage of this collection. This is likely because of Archive Hub's prominent presence in search engine results and its status as one of the major shared archival discovery spaces for the UK. Bearing in mind that the collection was already catalogued (for the most part), the increased usage provides evidence not only of the value of metadata itself but specifically of the importance of *appropriately structured* metadata exposed in *appropriate* locations. The collection's old MARC records had only a minimal presence in search engine results, and so effectively our cataloguing was confined to the silo of library catalogues. It was bad enough being in a silo, but our records were not even in the right silo: they were archival records in a library catalogue. This failing has now been corrected.

**Notes**

1. We did find publications for librarians on the technical aspects of working with archival MARC records (McCrory and Russell, 2005; Brown and Harvey, 2007; Frank, 2013), but our project instead involved creating archival descriptions from scratch. There is much, often informally published, guidance written by archivists for non-archivists; see the listing on The National Archives webpages, for example: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/advice-and-guidance/managing-your-collection/cataloguing/cataloguing-archive-collections/ (accessed 23rd January 2025).
2. IMDB Website – Philip Mackie, full credits: www.imdb.com/name/nm0533524/fullcredits (accessed 23rd January 2025).
3. For all the limitations of the flat structure that MARC records impose, library catalogues are able to fulfil a lot of basic functions.
4. ExLibris Online Help: https://knowledge.exlibrisgroup.com/Primo/Product_Documentation/020Primo_VE/Primo_VE_(English)/110Publishing_for_Primo_VE/Configuring_Sitemap_Files_for_Primo_VE (accessed 23rd January 2025).
5. The conceptual hierarchy of Work, Expression, Manifestation, and Item (WEMI) expressed in Riva *et al.* (2017, p. 10).
6. For the FISO user tasks, see Riva *et al.* (2017, pp. 15–16).

7. See Hunter (2020, pp. 101-102) for a summary of some criticisms of MPLP, including Van Ness (2010) and Prom (2010). Santamaria (2015, pp. 121–141) tackles some objections to MPLP (and extensible processing) head-on.
8. National standards, such as *Describing Archives: A Content Standard* (DACS) in the USA, are often compatible with ISAD(G). The website of the Society of American Archivists describes DACS as "the US implementation" of ISAD(G): www2.archivists.org/groups/technical-subcommittee-on-describing-archives-a-content-standard-dacs/describing-archives-a-content-standard-dacs-second- (accessed 24 January 2025).
9. For example, The National Archives (of the UK) maintains a webpage with useful information (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/advice-and-guidance/managing-your-collection/cataloguing/cataloguing-and-archives-networks/ (accessed 21 January 2025).
10. Combs, Matienzo, Proffitt & Spiro (2015, p. 53) list several of these, but the only one that appears to be still available is at the California Digital Library: https://help.oac.cdlib.org/support/solutions/articles/9000107790-ead-web-templates (accessed 23 January 2005).
11. Archives Hub offers some XML templates to assist with this: https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/eadtemplates/(accessed 20 January 2025).
12. See https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/console-faq/, viewed 23rd January 2025. In its place, the Archives Hub offer a spreadsheet template for the creation of descriptions: https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/contributing/ (accessed 23 January 2025).
13. The National Archives: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/advice-and-guidance/managing-your-collection/cataloguing/cataloguing-archive-collections/ (accessed 23 January 2025).
14. It is worth noting that the metadata we added to Wikidata (see more on this below) is able to express this relationship very well. Mackie's adaptation is linked to both Middleton's original and our archival holdings in Wikidata, so a link between Middleton and our holdings can be traced, but at one step removed: this seems to reflect the nature of the relationship accurately.
15. See, however, Meissner (2019, p. 62) for the importance of relationships to archival description.
16. See Meissner (2019, p. 148) on the value of creating metadata today that will "facilitate the power of linked open data in the future."
17. Though such a picture would always have been incomplete, as the records did not cover the entire collection, and the flat structure of the records would have made it much more difficult than it should be.
18. As Santamaria (2015, p. 7) notes, there is an ethical argument for such an approach, and so there would be a good rationale for it even with collections that seem to be widely known and well used.
19. Archives Hub homepage: https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/ (accessed 22 January 2025).
20. Combs *et al.* (2015, p. 52) list several such consortia.
21. Though bespoke and unlikely to be of wider use without heavy editing, the script is available at https://github.com/JTC-librarian/EAD_to_marc (accessed 23rd January 2025).

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