Accidentally on purpose: denying any responsibility for the accidental archive

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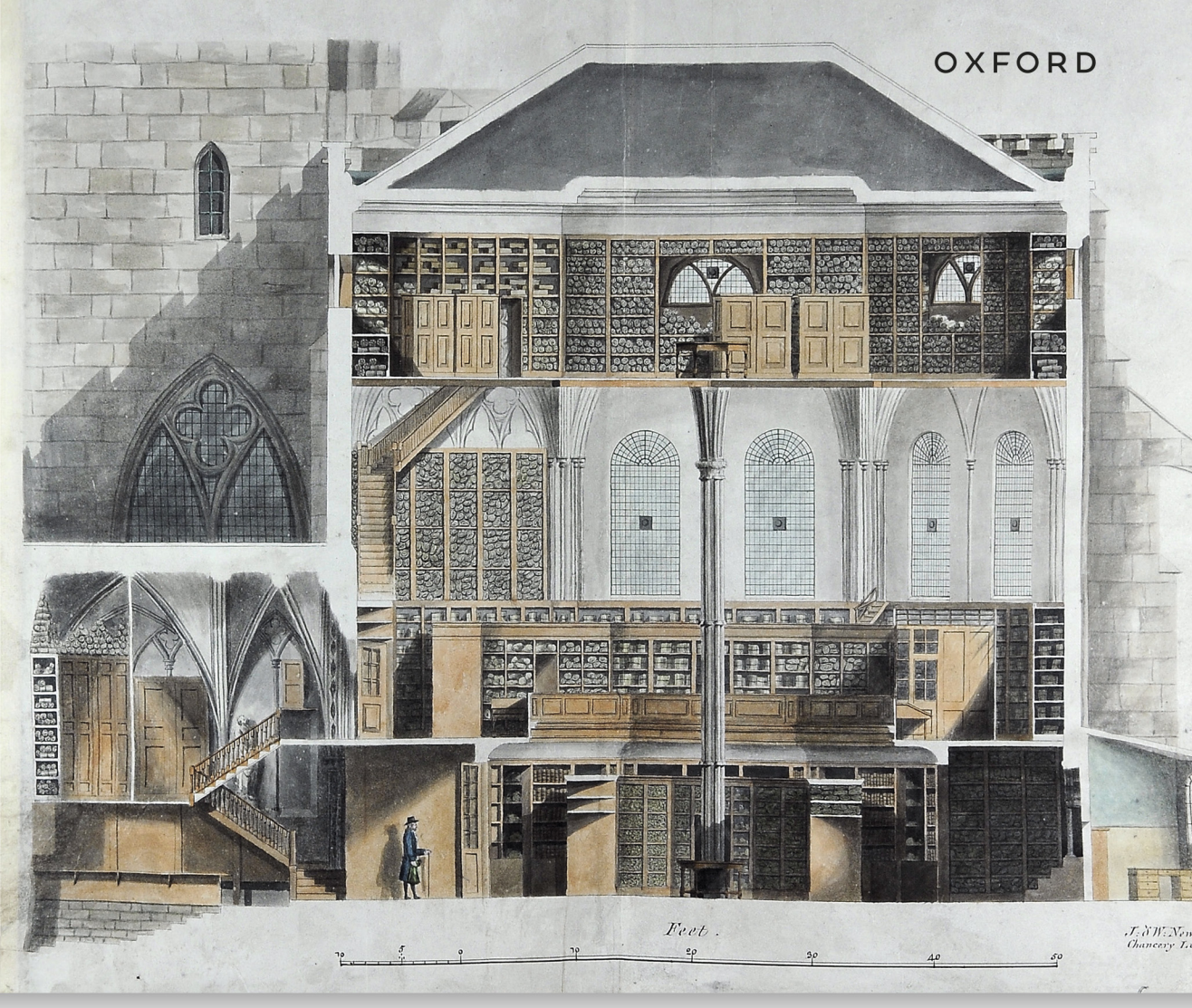

Archives

Power, Truth, and Fiction

Edited by Andrew Prescott and Alison Wiggins

Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature

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CHAPTER 23

ACCIDENTALLY ON PURPOSE

Denying Any Responsibility for the Accidental Archive

NADINE AKKERMAN AND PETE LANGMAN

It is, perhaps, an irony worth noting that the term 'accidental archive' came into being accidentally. It first appeared as the title of an article discussing the Library of Congress Collection: 'The Accidental Archive' (1966), by the film scholar Harvey Deneroff.[1] Since then, the term has popped up in anthropology, history, feminist literary theory, and new media studies, for example in Amy Tector's 'The Almost Accidental Archive' (2006), Rebekah Ahrendt and David van der Linden's 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank: Experiencing the Accidental Archive' (2017), Carol Pal's 'The Accidental Archive' (2018), and Michael Moss and David Thomas's 'The Accidental Archive' (2018), to name but four.[2] Certainly, the term's survival appears to be entirely accidental as three of these pieces manage to have the term in the title but not in the body text, which is perhaps why the only one that uses the phrase points out (rather astutely, it appears) that the term is under-theorized, before actually giving the reader a definition (albeit almost *en passant*):

> We need a new archival methodology, one that relies not just on the formal archives consciously created by people interested in keeping a record of the past but also on what we call the 'accidental archive': a set of sources handed down to us not by an institution but by people who never dreamed of creating a formal record of the past.[3]

Ahrendt and Van der Linden almost, therefore, define the accidental archive, but do so primarily in terms of what it is not. Rather than professing a new methodology, they then carry out a process they term 'the archaeology of the archive', essentially an object biography, a scholarly uncovering of the history of the Brienne Collection, the archive at the heart of their study. And they carry this

out very well indeed, though they continually both assert and deny that there is any moment during the process at which one may point and say '*This* is the archive' (accidental or otherwise). In essence, for them, the archive can never be settled or stable: it resists such interpretations.

What we would like to suggest is that not only *can* an archive be considered settled and stable, it *must* be in order for us to consider it an archive, even if such stability is never, in fact, possible. In our *assumption* of stability we can, in the end, make use of its fluidity.

When Is an Archive: The Brienne Collection

The Brienne Collection is, depending on your viewpoint, a trunk full of letters, a lot of letters and a trunk, or a lot of letters. As two of the international team of scholars assembled to make some sense of this 're-discovery', Ahrendt and Van der Linden unravel the travails of this collection, now held in the media museum Sound and Vision The Hague, the Netherlands (formerly Museum voor Communicatie in The Hague), describing the life of these letters first amassed by the Briennes, a highly respected seventeenth-century Postmaster and Postmistress, and explore the rationale behind their collection.

In 1676, Simon de Brienne (né Veillaume) was appointed Postmaster to deliver international mail, letters to and from the Southern Netherlands and France, in The Hague, the capital of the Dutch Republic. He shared the position with Christoffel Tromer, who was replaced ten years later by Marie Germain, Brienne's wife. She was appointed as Postmistress, one of the few offices to which a woman could officially be appointed in the seventeenth century (in The Hague, she was preceded by Postmistress Cornelia Borrebach,[4] and the Briennes also employed a '*bestelster*', a woman called Geertruy Lus, responsible for delivery of letters to a home address).[5] In 1689, a year after the Glorious Revolution, the pair decamped to England for eleven years to serve the Stadtholder-turned-king of England William III and Queen Mary at Kensington Palace as 'housekeeper and wardrobe-keeper'.[6] In this time one of their employees began to put aside so-called 'dead' letters: letters that could either not be delivered or that were refused. Whether this was done under orders or on the employee's own initiative is not known, but the motivation was clearly financial: in the early modern period it was the recipient who paid for delivery, so each dead letter represented a coin unreceived. This is why the letters all bear a mark in red crayon: the price of redemption.

The undelivered letters remained set aside until someone chose to redeem one by paying the postage owed, and the monies collected thereby were split annually between Brienne and his 'deputy-cum-successor, Willem Gerrit Dedel, who had been appointed in 1703 to replace Brienne's [recently] deceased wife'.[7] This process was actually illegal, however, as 'Dutch postmasters were obliged to return such

"dead letters" to France within a fortnight, so that the French could be reimbursed for their costs to the Dutch border'.[8] Illegal or not, a note made by Brienne's accountant Hugo van der Meer following Brienne's death in 1707 refers to the profits made from the undelivered letters as a *spaarpotje*, or 'piggy bank'.[9] Brienne and Dedel were at best withholding and at worst cozening money from foreign authorities. So far, so good: but how do we go from here to the Brienne Collection being an archive (whether accidental or otherwise)? Perhaps the simplest way possible is worth a try.

In 1620, the politician, essayist, and philosopher of science Francis Bacon made a series of observations on the most appropriate manner in which natural historical observations ought to be noted down:

> make sure that everything which is adopted is set down briefly and concisely, so that they are not exceeded by the words that report them. For no one collecting and storing materials for shipbuilding or the like bothers (as shops do) about arranging them nicely and displaying them attractively; rather his sole concern is that they be serviceable and good, and take up as little space as possible in the warehouse.[10]

What Bacon is talking about is, in effect, a data storage facility—and such a facility is not far off from becoming an archive. In fact, one might even suggest that every archive was once such a facility, no matter how informal—any potentially finite mode of storage might suffice. But the question at hand is whether we can produce a working definition of the 'accidental archive' that is of some actual use. Naturally, deciding on what each word means gives us a head start, so let's return to the very term 'archive', and see what new methodologies become apparent from a re-appraisal.

Eric Ketelaar finds common ground 'between traditional and current archivistics':

> archives consist of documents holding 'information created, received, and maintained as evidence and/or as an asset by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business or for its purposes, regardless of medium, form or format.'[11]

In these terms, namely *ISO 30300*, the Brienne Collection is most definitely an archive, because its constituent parts (the undelivered letters), were being 'maintained as an asset' in a specifically delineated collection 'in pursuance of business'. Ketelaar further notes that:

> Within the archival profession many distinguish between records (created and used in the course of business and kept as long as that business requires) and archives (records to be kept beyond their primary purpose). Many more, however, understand that this distinction has little relevance, especially in the digital age.[12]

Ignoring this distinction between records and archives not only leads us down a rabbit hole in which the only thing of importance is data, but also privileges

certain data-bearing units over others—letters over material objects, for example. Accordingly, we would like to propose another definition of archive, one which is not only of some use in its own right (digital age notwithstanding), but which also allows for the further theorization of sub-categories such as 'accidental'.

In order to do so, we must grasp the nettle and dare to designate the actual point at which an archive comes into being: the 'archival moment', if you like. This 'moment' we define as follows:

> when a collection of data-bearing units that coheres under a certain designation has been stored (either literally or conceptually) in a manner that suggests or expects stability and finality.

By stability or finality, we mean the moment of their Derridean domiciliation, their institutionalization or 'house arrest'.[13] The period before this *terminus ante quem*, that is, before the data-bearing units were deemed to be an archive (a moment which might also coincide with the naming of the archive), allows the scholar to distinguish what *flavour* of archive it is—the manner of its coming-into-being can supply us with clues as to how best to approach its study or *use*. An archival type functions as a caveat against contextual errors.

The archive is to data what the invention of moveable type was to religion: finally we could all be sure that each of us was singing from the same hymn-sheet. Of course, the idea of absolute consistency in books is as impossible as it is in archives, but life is like that. Sometimes we just have to accept that change is inevitable, and that becoming overly concerned with these possible changes is counterproductive.

Archives are often (and rightly) accused of reproducing or representing contemporary power structures, and to read them without awareness of this tendency is liable to lead to disaster. Were we, for example, to read the papers of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Secretary of State to Elizabeth I, as an impartial and complete account of activities within his office we would produce distorted history: the documents he saved were partial, highly curated, and retained for his own purposes. An equally foolish move, however, might be to treat an archive as if it were accumulated along Cecil's lines when the only real connecting strands are that, for the sake of argument, the documents were all in the same postal sack when their 'moment' came about. Assuming relationships that do not exist is just as damaging as ignoring those that do.

As with many attempts to delineate the form of something that is continually changing (that is, as methods of reading data evolve, for example), it is perhaps foolhardy to suggest that there is only a fixed number of types. More possible and useful is to formulate a definition of an accidental archive alongside definitions of those other types of archives with which it might easily be confused. We propose four basic types of archive: the asserted, the unintentional, the incidental and, last but not least, the accidental. Each of these types has its own distinctive features, and thus comes with its own caveats.

The Asserted Archive

asserted archive: an archive which consists of a collection of data-bearing units gathered together under a certain designation with the intention that they remain a coherent whole: an individual's papers; receipts, etc. This collection's archival moment comes about when a particular action asserts it as being finite, fixed, and stable. Such a moment might obtain in the death of the collector, its donation to a museum, and so forth. While from this moment the archive may not *actually* remain stable, it is asserted as being such.

Exemplar

Between 1697 and 1700, John Somers, Baron Somers, then in office as Lord High Chancellor of England, had arranged the papers of John Thurloe to 'be bound up in sixty seven volumes in folio'.[14] At that moment the papers of Thurloe, Oliver Cromwell's most memorable spymaster, became an Asserted Archive (and, conveniently, pertained to the *ISO 30300* guidelines as 'records to be kept beyond their primary purpose'). Somers had bought them from a clergyman, a friend of a certain Mr Tomlinson, who had discovered them in a 'false ceiling in the garret' of the third floor of no. 13 of the Dial Court at Lincoln's Inn, long since pulled down. Thurloe had moved there in 1659, having been forced to leave the somewhat grander apartments of no. 24, on the left hand of the ground floor of the Gatehouse Court (now the Old Buildings) which he had occupied since 1647, following complaints that he was too rarely in residence. A Mr William Battin, an Utter barrister, was generous enough to share his chamber and garret, the second and third floors of no. 13, with Thurloe for the reasonable fee of £10. It is in these more humble chambers originally adjoined the west end of the chapel that Thurloe died in 1668.[15] Thurloe had kept the papers he collected during his time as Cromwell's Secretary of State, chief intelligence officer, and Postmaster General, hiding them from the reinstated royalist regime. They mostly comprised intercepted documents: officers in his so-called Black Chamber, an intelligence unit that systematically spied on the post, would carefully open letters, copy their contents and refold, reseal (and where necessary repair paper tears with glue made from isenglass) in the hope that the recipient would not realize the information he or she was about to receive and possibly take action upon had been compromised. Thurloe kept these copies, but also other original letters and interrogation reports. At the Restoration, Charles II initially let him be, but Thurloe was arrested on suspicion of plotting the return to power of Richard Cromwell. His subsequent release came, however, when he blackmailed the government, saying he was in possession of 'a black book which should hang half them that went for Cavaliers'.[16] The black book in question has never been found, if it ever existed, but since the administration of Lincoln's Inn has always been referred to as 'black books', he could well have had in mind the papers hidden in his chambers.

These papers eventually passed from Somers's hands to those of Richard Rawlinson, the antiquary and nonjuror, who bequeathed his manuscripts to the Bodleian Libraries. Thurloe's papers were a database when he was alive: he never committed them to the ashes but kept them to retrieve information with which he might prosecute and/or blackmail individuals and their families; on his death they were transformed into an archive by those who scooped them up and bound them into a specific set of volumes. Unfortunately, they lacked souls poetic enough to have them bound into black volumes, but perhaps to expect a metaphorical black book to have its archival moment at the hands of a bookbinder with black boards is asking too much of history.

The caveat in this case is that the documents were held on account of the data within each one, allowing the historian to justifiably analyse and cross-reference this information in an attempt to extract what, exactly, Thurloe had wished to hold close.

If, however, it turns out that Thurloe kept these papers fully intending to disperse them, destroy them or otherwise, then it becomes what we call an *Unintentional Archive*.

The Unintentional Archive

unintentional archive: an archive which consists of a collection of data-bearing units gathered together under a certain designation with the specific intention that they do not remain a coherent whole: a bookseller's stock; a collection of undelivered letters, intended for exchange for profit. This collection's archival moment is the same as for an asserted archive. The difference is that its archival moment is indicative of its failure as a collection—it ought, by rights, to have been dissipated. Its moment thus also obtains in the death of the collector, its donation to a museum, and so forth. And similarly, while from this moment the archive may not *actually* remain stable, it is asserted as being such.

Exemplar

On 10 April 1926, the Ministry of Finance in The Hague donated the Brienne Collection, which they had owned since 1860 when the papers of the Orphanage of Delft were transferred to the ministry, to a collector intend upon opening a museum (which would open in November 1930). Queen Wilhelmina enacted a law in 1929 which '*retroactively empowered*' ministries to donate state goods to private foundations: governmental intervention now allowed for a particular article to be legally transferred from state ownership to a new museum. In this case what we now call the Brienne Collection became property of Het Nederlandsche Postmuseum in The Hague, soon to be renamed the Museum voor Communicatie, a privately funded foundation.[17] It was at this moment the collection was 'arrested'.

As the collection itself was intended for dissolution—that is, the letters swapped for ready cash—the Brienne Collection is an *unintentional archive*. The letters were initially collected on account of their being undelivered, so one might be led into making a category error at this juncture, and suggest that the only thing the letters have in common is that they were undelivered. If this was the case, and they had simply remained in the possession of the Briennes, we might be tempted to put this collection into a different category. But the letters were collected *because* they were undelivered, and this collection was a purposeful act—and one, as previously pointed out, that was actively illegal. This one purposeful act, along with the intent of later sale, is enough to allow the collection's archival moment to place it within the category of *unintentional archive*, but if this is not convincing, there are two extra pieces of evidence that support the case.

In his will, the devout Brienne signed over the undelivered letters to the Directors of the Orphanage of Delft, not wanting his Catholic brothers to lay claim to 'their share of the inheritance'. They could only do so on the condition that they converted to Protestantism, as he had done himself in the 1660s:

> The Testator declared that he did not to want or desire that these his heirs, or any one of them [individually] should have full disposition of their share of the inheritance; but that the capital will be administered by the Directors of the Orphanage of the City of Delft, who shall annually send or distribute to each of them and their descendants their portion of the interest on the said sum, for so long as they will be and remain within the community of the Roman Church.[18]

This indicates that after Brienne's death, the collection was still treated as a potential source of revenue—it was regarded as a monetary asset forming part of his estate—and this cannot have been because the letters were valuable to the recipients, as they would, like Brienne, either be deceased or nearly deceased. One item from the collection may serve to demonstrate the nature of many of these letters, as well as explain why they could be worth their weight in gold. The letter is dated November 1689 and from one lawyer to another:

> I feel by yours She [i.e. Lady Francesca Belmont] has not made you understand cleare enough the stat[e] of her concern in Holland which stands thus. Prince Rupert by vertu of a transaction made the year 1680 betwixt the Palatine [i.e. his brother] and him was to receave yearly a certain somme which the States [of Holland or General] payed yearly to the Palatine by way of pension, of this monyes after the Princes and the Palatines death a considerable somme of arrieres was lying in Mr de la Grottes hands a man known and easely to be found out in the place where you are. The Duk[e] of Orleans at the Palatines death fallowing out the pretensions of his Dutchesse laid claim to all he thought did belong to him and haveing hard of this monys lying in de la Grotts hands after the death of the Palatine of Prince Rupert and of Captaine [Dudley] Rupert [as he was titled] his son at Buda [i.e. Dudley Bard, the son Rupert had begotten by Francesca and who died at the siege of Buda in 1686] non[e] then appearing that had any right to that monyes, the Intindent of the Duk[e] d'Orleans traitted with de la Grotte and

> as its thoughts quitted him a shar[e] and receaved the reste for his Maister. My lady Bellemont who after her sons death had been for a year in a great distemper become better produces Prince Ruperts will to her son … by which she is made his universall legataire lays claim to this monye receaved by Mr dOrleans as beqeathed to her by her son and to him by his Father.[19]

These letters often include, or are even dominated by, reports regarding legal matters, children, or death notices. In this case, it is a document asserting that Prince Rupert of the Rhine wrote a bastard son into his will and that the family of the child's mother could lay claim to the inheritance.[20] The letters were not mere items of sentimentality: they were legal evidence. Brienne assumed that the descendants of the authors would at some point wish to avail themselves of the evidence within so that they might prove their connection to the addressees … and thus, perhaps, legitimate their claim to an inheritance, as Lady Francesca would later assert with success.[21] It is even possible to imagine that interested parties might be required to pay more than the postage to lay claim to an undelivered letter, were the contents to prove interesting enough. For Brienne it was not an innocent assemblage of letters written by various correspondents on a vast variety of topics; for him, their unifying principle was that they were documents with which he might exploit the precarious nature of human existence and displacement. Brienne must have known that these letters contained information without which some people might not be able to lay claim to what was rightfully theirs. There might also, of course, be the potential to blackmail, hold to ransom or generally make individuals pay handsomely to keep this same information secret.

If one were to assume that the Brienne letters were kept purely to be redeemed for postage, then it is likely that you would miss this second, rather more sinister, layer of data. Of the 2,600 letters that comprise the collection, some 600 are unopened. If just one of the other 2,600 was opened by Brienne, then it could only be to appraise himself of what was inside, and it is difficult to see any other reason to do so than to view the data to ascertain if it is worth money.

If, however, upon reading the letters, only a handful appear to fit a particular dataset of this sub-type, then these letters form what we call an *Incidental Archive*.

The Incidental Archive

incidental archive: the incidental archive is a collection of data-bearing units that form a part of a larger archive but that also has its own, internal coherence: letters to people in prison distributed in amongst a larger group of items; letters to women 'scientists', etc. This internal coherence may or may not have been intentional on the part of the original collector, it may simply become visible as research continues

and new methods of capturing data are conceived and tested, or it may simply be recognized by a historian.

Exemplar

The possibilities for the discovery of incidental archives are almost boundless, and care must be taken in their analysis, as it is particularly easy to move from 'the Brienne collection is formed of letters which were undelivered but kept in order to realise their monetary value at a later date, and a handful of these concern musicians' to 'in amassing the collection of letters the Briennes hoped, at some point, might be realizable into ready cash, they included amongst the letter types they held back those to or from musicians'. The letters concerning musicians form an *incidental archive*, and this information must be treated as such (as it always has been). Another example of an incidental archive, albeit one that is rather more sketchy, can be found in amongst the items recovered from a shipwreck, in this case, a series of bookbindings, some of which were stamped with the crest of the Royal House of Stuart, the royal line who had governed England from the death of Elizabeth Tudor in 1603 to the accession of William and Mary in 1688 (barring a little republican hiccough in the 1650s).[22]

In this latter case, these bookbindings, the *incidental archive*, are to be found in an *Accidental Archive*.

The Accidental Archive

accidental archive: a collection of data-bearing units for which the unifying principle behind their coherence is their archival moment: where this moment leads to a suggestion or expectation of stability and finitude. The contents of a trunk or a sack full of letters that have been placed together simply for the sake of their storage and transport become an accidental archive if the ship that is carrying the trunk or sack sinks, for example. While from this moment the archive may not *actually* remain stable, it appears as such.

Just as a theoretical (and waterproof) sack of letters on board a sinking ship may comprise an accidental archive, so might the entire contents of said ship. The possibility of multiple, overlapping archives can lead to things getting rather tricky, and it is here where devices of containment assume a certain importance—how can the scholar differentiate between items contained within discrete containers of their own (a trunk, for example) when the trauma of sinking and lying on the seabed for four hundred years has mixed everything up? Further to that, how can one be sure that a certain group of items did not come from another shipwreck, or were not thrown overboard from a perfectly serviceable vessel as it passed overhead? Again, this is where power structures return to haunt us—a scholar seeking a grant to study an 'archive' needs it to be discrete, not disparate.

Exemplar

Between 1645 and 1660, a ship that was built in *c.* 1645 foundered and sank off the coast of Texel, one of the Dutch Wadden Islands. In 2009, its wreck was discovered by Dutch amateur divers, and by 2010 it was officially registered with the Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed (RCE) as BZN17[23]—meaning this was the seventeenth wreck found on Burgzand, part of the Rede van Texel.[24] When the divers brought up a dress, or the remains thereof, in August 2014, having begun to bring up textiles in order to save them, interest in the wreck suddenly increased. The news was made public in April 2016. The 1,000–1,200 items recovered, including the silk dress of unknown origin and a selection of bookbindings whose paper contents had long since disintegrated, were recorded into a database as a discrete collection.[25] At this point, it may seem as though it was an archive waiting to happen—that is, when there is nothing left to bring up, or it is impossible to bring up anything more, the collection becomes an archive, and accidentally so. It is therefore an accidental archive. If we consider that the archival moment is at this point, then this is plainly correct. There is another possibility, however.

Once the decision has been taken to investigate the wreck and preserve whatever can be safely extracted, is it not then an archive, merely an *Invisible Archive*?

The Invisible Archive

invisible archive: a collection of data-bearing units whose existence has been postulated in such a way as to be contained within a finite boundary that is more or less clearly definable at the archival moment. Items yet to be removed from the invisible archive are merely data sets whose immanence is yet to be asserted through extraction. Such an archive may include items from a wreck yet to be preserved.

This final category, which we suggest with tongues only mildly contained (or archived) within cheeks, brings us neatly to the problem that besets all archives, namely, what are the boundaries or limits? In the case of the Brienne Collection, this boundary is supplied quite conveniently in the form of the trunk with which it has been, and will forever be, associated. Because the trunk is an object, it is particularly easy to fetishize, as Ahrendt and Van der Linden demonstrate at the outset of 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank':

> Hidden away in the vaults of the Museum … lies a most extraordinary trunk.… Although it appears inconspicuous, the wooden trunk was once a priceless object, its valuable contents protected from water damage by a layer of sealskin and from prying eyes by a heavy iron hasp lock. Glistening red wax seals bespeak the well-traveled nature of the trunk across the centuries. On opening the vaulted lid, a linen-lined interior is revealed. And the trunk is full, brimming with some twenty-six hundred undelivered letters.[26]

And herein lies the real problem. The trunk simply is not full of letters. It may once have been, but it most certainly is not now, and if it ever was, the point until which it remained so is unknown.

Certainly, when Nadine first saw it, in 2014, it was empty, the letters having been taken out and stored individually. Of course, when she recently visited the museum to film part of a documentary, the museum suggested that a layer of letters be placed in the trunk so that it *appeared* full. We readily agreed. That is what it is *meant* to look like. That is how it was intended, right? More to the point, our post-Romantic sensibilities demand that the Brienne Trunk house the letters 'it was designed to hold'. Well, there is no evidence that it is anything other than a rather common-or-garden trunk (other than, perhaps, the sealskin exterior, or even its wax seals, were we to identify to whom they must be attributed), in which this collection of letters was, at some point in its life, either stored, transported, or simply placed. The fact is that we do not know. The more interesting point is that the trunk itself *has no bearing on the status of the collection as an archive whatsoever*. And that holds even if you consider collection and trunk together to form the archive in question.

Ahrendt and Van der Linden illustrate here the problem with all archives, a problem they probe and manipulate throughout their piece, as they repeatedly reinforce and undermine any sense that an archive is ever, or can ever be seen to be, in any way stable:

> The trunk and its contents acceded into the collection of a museum, and at that moment they were transformed into a unified entity, an archive subjected to rules and organisation.[27]

Our post-Romantic sensibilities, as we have determined, demand that the trunk arrive at the museum 'full of letters', even though it is unclear when the trunk and the letters joined forces. The trunk does have a note attached describing it as containing the collection ('*Ongeopende brieven/Boedel De Brienne/Weeskamer Delft*'), but at the time of writing the date of the note is unknown—was it written in 1707, the 1850s, or, perhaps 1928?[28] There are even question marks over whether it is physically possible to fit the letters into the trunk.[29] More to the point, perhaps, is the note that accompanied the collection on its arrival at the museum in 1928: '*1 koffertje en 2 pakketten van honderden brieven uit de nalatenschap "de Brienne"*'.[30] Ahrendt and Van der Linden translate this as a 'chest and two packets of letters' but a better translation is perhaps 'a briefcase and two packets of letters', a briefcase such as someone working in government would carry—the collection was, after all, delivered *by* the ministry of finance. Perhaps there never was a trunk? Did a museum employee, confronted with a pile of old letters, spot an empty trunk in the museum stores, think to themselves '*I* know what'll look good in there!' and fool a group of serious academics almost a century later? Perhaps dendrochronology must come to our aid.

In this chapter, we have considered what an archive contains and what contains an archive. During this process we have hopefully been able to think harder about the problems that we face in archival studies, namely reading the archive such that we avoid catastrophic errors of contextual misplacement. It is not about 'allowing the documents to speak with their own voice', because that is simply not feasible. It is about trying to avoid stifling documents such that their data becomes stored in aspic. To return to the words of Francis Bacon:

> we should always remind ourselves that what is being prepared is a granary and storehouse of things, not comfortable accommodation for staying or living in, but a place we go down to when we need to fetch out something useful for the work of the *Interpreter*, which comes next.[31]

Yes, Bacon was talking of natural history, but the same is true for all manner of archival studies.

Ahrendt and Van der Linden suggest that an archive is:

> A repository of information, a container in which historical truths might be sought and constructed, and whose component parts beg to be further contained through the processes of ordering, cataloging, and interpreting.[32]

This is both correct and incorrect. An archive *is* an historical truth. It is made up of units of *fact* which need interpretation. Its container is conceptual, though in certain circumstances, this container's boundaries may accord perfectly with a physical container—and in other circumstances, these two containers, literal and metaphorical, may accord closely but not perfectly. What is at stake in all this is, of course, our ability to read *through* the power structures that have led to items coalescing into archives, and thus reading these items as existing in relation to, and possibly even because of, each other.

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FURTHER READING

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NOTES

1. H. Deneroff, 'The Accidental Archive', *Film Society Review* 2 (1966), 20–31. We thank Eileen Clancy for pointing this out.
2. A. Tector, 'The Almost Accidental Archive and Its Impact on Literary Subjects and Canonicity', *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40.2 (2006), 96–108; R. Ahrendt and D. van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank: Experiencing the Accidental Archive', *French Historical Studies* 40.2 (2017), 189–213; C. Pal, 'Accidental Archive: Samuel Hartlib and the Afterlife of Female Scholars', in V. Keller, A. M. Roos, and E. Yale, eds, *Archival Afterlives: Life, Death, and Knowledge-Making in Early Modern British Scientific and Medical Archives* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 120–149; and M. Moss and D. Thomas, 'The Accidental Archive', in C. Brown, ed., *Archival Futures* (Edinburgh: Facet, 2018), 117–135.
3. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 191.
4. K. Zandvliet, *De 250 rijksten van de Gouden Eeuw: kapitaal, macht, familie en levensstijl* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2006), 338–339 ('Simon de Brienne', no. 203).
5. W. J. M. Benschop, *Het postwezen van 's Gravenhage in derdehalve eeuw* (The Hague: Staatsbedrijf der Posterijen, Telegrafie en Telefonie, 1951), 86.
6. 'Letters patent of King William III, and Queen Mary, appointing Simon de Brienne and Mary his wife, housekeeper and wardrobe-keeper at their house at Kensington', 12 October [1689], as printed in *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1850), i.102.
7. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 202.
8. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 201.
9. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 202.
10. Francis Bacon, *Parasceve* in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol XI, *The Instauratio Magna: part II. Novum organum and associated texts*, ed. Graham Rees (Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press, 2000), 457.
11. E. Ketelaar, 'Foreword', in L. Corens, K. Peters, and A. Walsham, eds, *Archives & Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. xv, quoting *ISO 30300: Information and Documentation: Records Management—Part 2: Guidelines* (Geneva: International Standards Organization, 2011), 3.1.7. *ISO 30300* is due to be replaced by *ISO/DIS 30300*, but no information is yet available on what this might comprise (source: www.iso.org/standard/74291.html accessed 5 October 2019).
12. Ketelaar, 'Foreword', p. xv.
13. See Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 204–205.
14. T. Birch, ed., *A Collection of the State Papers of John Thurloe, Esq.*, 7 vols (London: Thomas Woodward, 1742), i, 'Preface', v.
15. C. W. Heckethorn, *Lincoln's Inn Fields and the Localities Adjacent: Their Historical and Topographical Associations* (London: Elliot Stock, 1896), 17.

16. T. Venning, 'Thurloe, John', *ODNB*, quoting *Fifth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. Part I: Report and Appendix* (Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1876), 208.
17. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 197, 203.
18. Gemeentearchief Delft, Weeskamer no. 11867: 'Testament of Simon de Brienne, The Hague, Jan. 13, 1707', as identified and translated in Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 199.
19. MvC, Brienne Collection, DB-1910: unknown to Monsieur Carney, 3 November 1689.
20. This assertion was correct. See Rupert's will, signed 27 November 1682, proved 1 December 1682, TNA, PROB 1/46, in which Rupert assigns the palace of Rhenen in the province of Utrecht to Dudley Bard, as well as everything owed to him by those 'not naturall borne subjects of the King of England'. Dudley Bard's illegitimacy is open to question, however; while the *ODNB* suggests that Rupert never acknowledged the marriage contract with Lady Francesca, in his will he terms Dudley 'my Naturall Sonne'.
21. Regardless of the legitimacy of the marriage, Lady Francesca would, in 1695, receive 20,000 crowns from Emperor Leopold I in settlement of her claim, see J. F. Chance, 'A Jacobite at the Court of Hanover', *The English Historical Review* 11.43 (1896), 527–530.
22. See J. Dickinson, 'Een Unieke Collectie Verdronken Boeken', in Birgit van den Hoven, Iris Toussaint, and Arent Vos, eds, *Wereldvondsten uit een Hollands schip: Basisrapportage BZN17/Palmhoutwrak* (Province Noord-Holland, 2019), *passim*. See also J. Dickinson, 'Drowned Books and Ghost Books: Making Sense of the Finds from a Seventeenth-Century Shipwreck off the Dutch Island of Texel', *The Seventeenth Century* 38.1 (2023), 49–85.
23. Arent Vos, 'Inleiding', in van den Hoven, Toussaint, and Vos, eds, *Wereldvondsten*,19.
24. Arent Vos, 'Achtergronden en vondstgeschiedenis', in van den Hoven, Toussaint, and Vos, eds, *Wereldvondsten*, 32.
25. R. van Eerden, 'Proloog', in van den Hoven, Toussaint, and Vos, eds, *Wereldvondsten*, 11.
26. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 189.
27. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 193.
28. See Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 202.
29. While fitting over 3,000 letters into the Brienne trunk would itself be quite a feat, to do so in such a manner that an individual letter would be retrievable easily enough to claim the few coins its redemption may warrant is another matter entirely.
30. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 198.
31. Bacon, *Parasceve*, 459.
32. Ahrendt and Van der Linden, 'The Postmasters' Piggy Bank', 193.