

Sarsen Stones in Wessex Project Archive | Katy Whitaker

THE SARSEN STONES IN WESSEX PROJECT ARCHIVE

Archive report and ISAD(G) Fonds Level Description

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
1.1. The Sarsen Stones in Wessex Survey	1
1.2. The Sarsen Stones in Wessex Project Archive	1
1.3. Scope	1
2. The Sarsen Stones in Wessex Survey	3
2.1. Project history	3
2.2. Project aims and methods	4
2.3. Significance	6
2.4. Audiences	7
3. The Sarsen Stones in Wessex Project Archive	9
3.1. Relationship to publications	9
3.2. Current archive management and access	9
3.3. Archive organisation	9
3.4. Storage, housings, and archive formats	11
3.5. Future accruals	12
4. Archive issues	13
4.1. Storage requirements and conservation	13
4.2. Copyright and ownership	13
Annex A The hand-list	14
Annex B ISAD(G) Fonds Level Description	17
References	21

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey

The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey began in earnest at the Society of Antiquaries of London in early 1974, intended to be the first action of the Society's wider *Evolution of the Landscape* Project. A survey of sarsens in the counties of Wiltshire, Dorset, and Hampshire was proposed as a suitable pilot for the landscape investigation project, and fieldwork ensued. In 1977 Collin Bowen FSA and Isobel Smith FSA published a paper summarising progress to date, "Sarsen Stones in Wessex: the Society's first investigations in the Evolution of the Landscape Project." (Bowen and Smith, 1977).

1.2. The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* Project Archive

The project archive relates primarily to the fieldwork carried out by volunteer participants in the three counties covered by the project; the synthesis of site and parish records to generate county-wide mapping; the production of map illustrations for publication purposes. There is a typescript hand-list. The archive is curated by the Society of Antiquaries of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BE. It can be consulted on request at the Society's library (<https://www.sal.org.uk/library/visiting-and-using-the-library/>).

1.3. Scope

This report briefly describes the project and summarises its significance (it is not a critique of the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey). A description of the physical format of its archive is based on a rapid survey of the collection at the Society of Antiquaries library carried out in October 2016, and with reference to the available hand-list. Key archival issues are highlighted but this does not constitute a full conservation assessment.

The report does not include reference to relevant Society of Antiquaries archive material such as meeting minutes or financial records relating to the

project's management. Stone samples collected during the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* project have not been seen. Locations curating duplicate copies of parts of the archive are noted, but not all have been consulted (where duplicate material has been seen, this is made clear in the text of this report).

2. THE SARSEN STONES IN WESSEX SURVEY

2.1. Project History

The Society of Antiquaries is a learned society, established by Royal Charter in the eighteenth-century. Its purpose is the study of antiquities and history, and its membership (currently c3,000 Fellows) includes scholars distinguished in fields including archaeology, architecture, art history, numismatics, palaeography and other branches of history. The Society is international in reach, and also has a remit to encourage public understanding of heritage and to support research (<https://www.sal.org.uk/about-us/>). One of the Society's committees is concerned with research: the Society has a track-record of supporting research projects since the late-nineteenth-century, such as the excavations at Silchester and Sutton Hoo (<https://www.sal.org.uk/about-us/our-history/>).

In 1972, the Research Committee convened a sub-committee with the purpose of promoting research into the long-term history of landscape organisation, choosing to focus on the extensive and dense archaeological and historical palimpsest of Britain's central-southern chalk Downland (Cunliffe et al., 1972, Bowen and Cunliffe, 1973). On 23 February 1974, the inaugural meeting of participants interested in the *Evolution of the Landscape* project was convened at the Society of Antiquaries (Society of Antiquaries of London, 1974).

Wessex was chosen to be the pilot study area, comprising the counties of Wiltshire, Dorset, and Hampshire. The meeting attendees discussed two research methodologies: intensive studies of targeted localities, concerned to explore the long time-depth of landscape change in particular places; and thematic studies over the whole study area, exploring a range of subjects (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 185).

Taking the latter approach, as its first themed study the *Evolution of the Landscape* project embarked on a survey of sarsen stones, known to be

distributed across the three counties. Whilst a notional limit of one year was set for the survey phase, the initial results were not reviewed until May 1975 (Society of Antiquaries of London, 1975). By that time field survey in Dorset was “substantially complete” (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 185) and continuing in Hampshire and Wiltshire. By 1977 this work was almost finished, with acknowledged gaps in north-east Hampshire and in the militarily-restricted area of the Salisbury Plain Training Area.

Whilst further enquiries from anyone wishing to continue to contribute to the project were encouraged (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 185-6), two Fellows proceeded to synthesise the data collected by that time and published the results, in order to draw researchers’ attention to the archive’s existence (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 186). The archive material that had been assembled by 1977 was deposited in the Society’s library, except the Hampshire survey material which was not deposited until 1993 (see HSS01 Hampshire Sarsen Survey, Historic England Archive). Microfiche copy of most of the project archive was made by RCHME in 1980; a set of these sheets is available in the Historic England Archive (uncatalogued, this includes copies of the Dorset and Wiltshire record sheets, maps annotated during the project, and maps/imagery produced for publication purposes, but not the Hampshire record sheets).

2.2. Project Aims and Methods

The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey had been identified as a suitable investigation for the *Evolution of the Landscape* project because of the common characteristic of sarsens as surface boulders. Naturally occurring in surface spreads in the study area, sarsens were identified by the project participants as impediments to agriculture, a problem to be solved by early farmers. It should be noted that there is no evidence in the project archive or in related papers archived in the Historic England Archive (uncatalogued collection SOA/03) that the project organisers had surveyed the geological literature in advance, to establish the overall incidence of sarsen and other silcretes in southern Britain. The focus was to be three Wessex counties

because of the significance of the surviving archaeological record there, for interpreting the development of agriculture in prehistory.

The study of these geological features, and prehistoric responses to them, was seen as a fundamental step towards interpreting landscape change in the study area: and, by enumerating those responses, would be revealing of technological issues (agricultural practices) and factors such as population pressure in prehistory (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 185, 189). Three project aims were identified:

- Establish the former incidence of sarsen stone in the study area;
- Describe how sarsen stones in the study area had been dealt with in the Neolithic, as a mineral resource or as impediments;
- Understand the effect of sarsen stones on underlying chalk bedrock.

An additional factor was that the survey methods be relatively simple, and amenable to analysis. Approximately 100 volunteers were involved in the fieldwork which was collated in Dorset by John Bailey, in Wiltshire by Isobel Smith, and in Hampshire by Peter Gallup and Arthur ApSimon. Participants were given information sheets describing what to look for, and record sheets (“Tally Cards”) for completion. Extensive searches covering every parish were intended but whilst the results were felt to offer “a consistent statement of distribution” (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 186), differences between the counties were conceded: for example, the Dorset results included a record of the natural sarsen distribution, whilst in Hampshire, the volunteers were thought to have found only utilised sarsens in anthropogenic contexts.

The principal outputs were the distribution maps published, in black and white, as Figures 2 and 3 in Bowen and Smith (1977, 190, 192). Figure 2 shows the distribution of single natural sarsens, groups of natural sarsens, and utilised sarsen, identified in the Wessex area by the volunteer surveyors. Figure 3 shows this information for the Avebury-Stonehenge area of Wiltshire, breaking down the category of utilised sarsen by period (prehistoric, Romano-British,

Saxon, medieval, and post-medieval). County maps showing these distributions but with coloured markers representing these period distinctions form part of the archive. It is notable that none of the records included the location of sarsen setts and other nineteenth- and twentieth-century street furniture, which can nevertheless be seen in many of the towns and villages visited by the volunteers.

In addition to the collation of “Tally Cards” recording the location and use of sarsen boulders, two small excavations were carried out on Overton Down (Wiltshire) to explore the physical relationship between surface sarsens and the underlying geology. The results were summarised (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 193-5). The archive collection MS953 includes only the publication drawings from the excavations, whilst black and white photographs and some notes about the excavations can be found in files in the uncatalogued collection SOA/03, Historic England Archive.

2.3. Significance

The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey was not the first sarsen stone survey. Aside from the recording practices of earlier twentieth century geologists writing British Geological Survey *Memoirs* explaining map sheets in areas where sarsens are present (for example Osborne White (1907), Sherlock (1922)), which tended to be quite systematic, a project also carried out by volunteers was led in Buckinghamshire in the early 1950s (Morley Davies and Baines, 1953). The aim of that fieldwork was to find and map silcretes (both sarsens and puddingstones) in the general area of the Chilterns from south-east Oxfordshire to north-west Hertfordshire, although without the emphasis on human use of the stone and the landscapes in which it is found. The archive of that project is kept in the Bucks County Museum Resource Centre (Halton).

Earlier examples of ‘crowd-sourced’, volunteer-driven data-collecting in the historic environment include, for example, the *National Record of Industrial Monuments* (Buchanan, 1969, 1971) and, in a similar vein (although not

specifically project-led), the RCHME and National Buildings Record use of local correspondents and photographers to capture information for the record (Sargent, 2001). Nevertheless, the Society of Antiquaries' project was unusual for its cross-disciplinary intent, with both archaeological and geological goals framed within the theoretical concept of 'landscape', and it stands out as an early attempt at a landscape archaeology project.

In this sense, the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey epitomises developments of later-twentieth-century British archaeology, with its focus on resources and environmental constraints to human behaviour, inter-disciplinarity, and an aim to understand landscape rather than a single site or a class of monument. Although the brief publication of the project's results in 1977 did not answer to the aims discussed in 1974 (Society of Antiquaries of London, 1974) and 1975 (Society of Antiquaries of London, 1975), the mapping has formed the basis of subsequent general distribution maps of silcretes in southern Britain, such as Ulliyot and Nash (2006). In addition to the location data, which could now be better handled in a GIS environment, the original record sheets contain more information about human interaction with sarsen and siliceous conglomerates in the project's study area. A digitised and critically-evaluated dataset derived from the original archive material, and including the unpublished content added after 1977, would be a substantial benefit to geological, archaeological, and historical studies of silcretes in southern Britain.

2.4. Audiences

Future audiences for the archive include a range of archaeologists and geologists who are engaged in sarsen stone research. In contrast to the interest in, for example, "exotic" stones such as the Stonehenge bluestones (for example, Bevins and Ixer, 2016, Bevins et al., 2016, Ixer and Bevins, 2010, Ixer and Bevins, 2011a, Ixer and Bevins, 2011b, Ixer and Bevins, 2013, Ixer et al., 2015, Ixer and Bevins, 2016, Parker Pearson et al., 2016, Thomas, 1923), or rock types other than flint used for Neolithic axe-heads (such as Clough and Cummins, 1979, Clough and Cummins, 1988 and

including for example University College Dublin's Irish Stone Axe Project and Project JADE, National Agency for Research (France)), sarsen has previously attracted less sustained archaeological attention. This is now changing as sarsen's geological formation processes in particular, as well as its uses in the past, are being investigated (Banfield, 2016, Field, 2005, Gillings and Pollard, 1999, Gillings and Pollard, 2016, Green, 2016, Pollard and Gillings, 2009, Summerfield and Goudie, 1980, Ulliyott et al., 2004, Ulliyot and Nash, 2006, Ulliyott and Nash, 2016). The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey distribution maps form the basis of mapping re-drawn in later publications such as these, but the primary data have not yet been made available in formats that can be analysed in more detail.

In addition, sarsen stone attracts considerable interest from local and community groups in the areas of the stone's natural distribution. Whilst it is harder to document this interest, examples include the Wiltshire Archaeological Field Group survey of archaeological features, including sarsen spreads, features, and quarrying, in West Woods (Amadio, 2011); the popularity of guided walks in the Fyfield Down National Nature Reserve and upper Kennet Valley led by archaeologists and geologists to visit sarsen trains and structures; and local outrage at attempts to break a sarsen stone, using historical techniques, during an archaeological research project (Gillings et al., 2008, 355).

There is, therefore, a broad audience for the more detailed levels of data that are available from the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey archive than was published in Bowen and Smith (1977).

3. THE SARSEN STONES IN WESSEX PROJECT ARCHIVE

3.1. Relationship to publications

The only publication arising directly from the project is Bowen and Smith (1977).

3.2. Current archive management and access

The project archive is managed by its creator institution, the Society of Antiquaries of London. Access is available according to the Society's advertised terms and conditions. The collection is not digitised but there is a typescript hand-list: the collection content is catalogued to file or item level within sub-fonds or series. Copies of the records relating to Hampshire were deposited in the Hampshire Record Office (where they are catalogued under collection number 113M93) and with the local authority planning department (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 186). Microfiche of the Dorset and Wiltshire record sheets, the project's maps, and publication images, is held by the Historic England Archive.

3.3. Archive organisation

The Society of Antiquaries' collection, numbered MS 953, comprises five boxes and two folders of material, organised into four series (Table 1). The content of each series is detailed in Annex A.

Reference	Title
953/1	General sarsen survey
953/2	Dorset sarsen survey
953/3	Hampshire sarsen survey
953/4	Wiltshire sarsen survey

Table 1 Series in the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* project archive.

Series 953/2 does not include the stone samples that were collected by the project in Dorset (Bowen and Smith, 1977, 186), which may be in the Society's museum collection along with material collected by the Society from William Gowland's 1901 excavation at Stonehenge (Gowland, 1902).

The project's basic unit of record is the "Tally Card", sheets that were completed by the volunteers. For Hampshire and Dorset these are paper sheets normally including the following fields (not all fields were necessarily completed by each recorder):

- "Group or single"
- "Whether in situ"
- "Any name"
- "Position (marked on map and elaborated in sketch if necessary)"
- "NGR"
- "Bedrock"
- "Drift"
- "Height over OD"
- "Situation (e.g. hill-top, valley, under trees etc)"
- "Description: type of rock (if it includes pebbles, note whether rounded or angular; note particularly if very small pink or white quartz pebbles are included, and again note whether round or angular)"
- "Size and shape (noting if very large with sketch)"
- "If group, density"
- "Condition (e.g. apparent nature of bedding, weathering on surface, algae etc)"
- "Evidence for use"
- "Relationship (e.g. to fields ancient or modern)"
- "AP consulted"
- "Photographs taken (wherever possible)"
- "Additional notes"
- "Name of recorder (printed)"

- “Date”

A small number of original “Tally Cards” for records in Dorset have been found in the uncatalogued collection SOA/03, Historic England Archive. Images of these 23 sheets do not appear in the microfiche that was made by RCHME in 1980. These sheets have been returned to MS953 at the Society of Antiquaries of London.

Alternative versions of the basic “Tally Card” were used in Dorset, and occasionally home-made sheets were used by volunteers in all three counties. The Wiltshire records comprise mainly postcards, containing far less information than the Dorset and Hampshire “Tally Cards”, with some additional data included on separate sheets. Whilst the Hampshire and Dorset records are organised by parish, those for Wiltshire are arranged by Ordnance Survey 1:25000 map sheet. Dorset, for example, has “Tally Cards” bundled into 50 parish files, with one or more “Tally Card” in each parish file. The Wiltshire records are bundled with each relevant published map sheet, sometimes annotated to indicate the location of the recorded sarsens. Annotated map sheets for Dorset and Hampshire are kept separately from those counties’ “Tally Cards”.

3.4. Storage, housings, and archive formats

The collection is stored in a number of small boxes and two folders of maps. The formats are varied (Table 2).

Primary housing	Secondary housing	Contents	Formats
Archival quality box, c40cm x c30cm x c12cm		953/1/1-6 and items from 953/2, 953/3, 953/4	Mixed paper sizes and microfiche
A0 map folder		Maps and plans	Mixed paper sizes
A2 map folder		953/2/3	Ordnance Survey sheets
Box file	Foolscap envelopes	953/2/1	Mixed paper sizes

Archival quality box, c40cm x c30cm x c12cm	Plastic and wooden slide boxes	953/2/4/1-2	35mm and 70mm colour transparencies
Box file	Foolscap envelopes	953/4/1-2	Postcards and mixed paper sizes, Ordnance Survey sheets
Box file		953/3/3/5	Ordnance Survey sheets

Table 2 *Sarsen Stones in Wessex Archive storage.*

3.5. Future accruals

The project was completed with the deposit of Hampshire archive material at the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1993. No future accruals are expected.

4. ARCHIVE ISSUES

4.1. Storage requirements and conservation

Current storage conditions are generally appropriate both for access and future security other than the three box files, the preponderance of non-archival paper envelopes to store “Tally Cards”, and the current slide and photograph housings.

Various maps in the collection, annotated with coloured sticky dots, are now compromised: the dots stuck onto the paper or drawing film sheets have lost their adhesion. Many of the dots are loose in the folders or lost entirely. The primary data are recorded on the “Tally Cards”, so it is possible to re-map the information: although such an exercise is unlikely to interpret the data in precisely the same way as in 1977 for the project publication. The publication drawings also record some of this data, although in black and white.

Some of the Wiltshire “Tally Card” postcards have in the past been bundled by rubber bands. These have perished, sticking some of the cards together and sticking some cards to the envelopes that house them.

4.2. Copyright and ownership

The collection is © The Society of Antiquaries of London. Archiving of the transcribed dataset *WessexSarsens.xlsx*¹ is by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

¹ Available in the University of Reading Data Archive.

Annex A Sarsen Stones in Wessex archive hand-list

Society of Antiquaries: MS 953, "Wessex Sarsen Stone Survey"

Access to Archives record:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/de4ca10e-d46d-415c-b06a-380932b780ca>

Reference		Content
953/1		General sarsen survey
	953/1/1	Sarsen symposium, evolution of the landscape project: News Sheet No2, an account of a meeting held at the Society of Antiquaries, 10 May 1975.
	953/1/2	List of sarsens considered in the Evolution of the Environment Project, and arranged by county and parish.
	953/1/3	Map showing distribution of sarsen stones in southern England (Fig 1 in Bowen and Smith (1977))
	953/1/4	Map of sarsens in Wessex, plotted during the course of the evolution of the landscape project (Fig 2 in (Bowen and Smith, 1977))
	953/1/5	RCHM microfiche copy of sarsen survey material
	953/1/6	Tracing of aerial photographs made by NMR flights on 18, 25 and 30 July, and showing sarsen distribution in Gloucestershire
953/2		Dorset sarsen survey
	953/2/1	Tally cards giving details of Dorset sarsens; arranged in alphabetical order by parish
	953/2/2a	OS 1:100,000 map of Dorset, showing distribution of sarsens (much of the marking lost)
	953/2/2b	OS 1:100,000 map of Dorset, showing distribution of sarsens (reduced copy)
	953/2/3	OS 1:25,000 maps used in survey (10 maps)
	953/2/4	Transparencies
		953/2/4/1 140 35mm transparencies
		953/2/4/2 15 transparencies
953/3		Hampshire sarsen survey
	953/3/1	Reports and related material

		953/3/1/1	Report entitled "The Survey of Sarsen Stones – Hampshire", by Peter Gallup (1986)
		953/3/1/2	List of sarsens in survey (1986)
		953/3/1/3	Report entitled "The Survey of Sarsen Stones – Hampshire", by Peter Gallup (1993), including list of sarsens in survey
	953/3/2		Tally cards giving details of Hampshire sarsens; arranged alphabetically by parish
		953/3/2/1	Hampshire parishes A-L
		953/3/2/2	Hampshire parishes M-Z
	953/3/3		Maps
		953/3/3/1	OS 1:100,000 map of Hampshire and the Isle of White, showing distribution of sarsens (2 sheets)
		953/3/3/2a	Map showing distribution of sarsens on Hampshire, with surveyors' areas
		953/3/3/2b	Map showing distribution of sarsens on Hampshire (May 1975)
		953/3/3/2c	Map showing distribution of sarsens on Hampshire (May 1975)
		953/3/3/3	Map showing distribution of sarsens for which there is no clear history or purpose
		953/3/3/4a	OS SU42 NE, map of Winchester
		953/3/3/4b	Tracing of 953/3/3/4a showing distribution of sarsens
		953/3/3/4c	Tracing of 953/3/3/4a showing distribution of sarsens
		953/3/3/5	OS 1:25,000 maps used in survey (35 sheets)
	953/3/4		Photographs
		953/3/4/1	Album containing 7 photographs of sarsens and boundary markers
		953/3/4/2	Photographs of sarsens, and 3 index cards
	953/3/5		101 transparencies of Hampshire sarsens
953/4			Wiltshire sarsen survey
	953/4/1		Envelopes containing tally cards/index cards giving details of Wiltshire sarsens, maps, transparencies and other recorded information. Material is arranged by OS 1:25,000 reference number
		953/4/1/1-29	Envelopes numbered by OS map sheet, containing tally cards etc as above

	953/4/2		Additional information relating to Wiltshire survey, not found with tally cards in 953/4/1/1-29
	953/4/3a		OS 1:100,000 map of Wiltshire
	953/4/3b		Tracing of 953/4/3a showing distribution of sarsens
	953/4/3c		Tracing of 953/4/3a showing distribution of sarsens (reduced copy)
	953/4/4		Map of sarsens in the Avebury to Stonehenge area (Fig 3 in Bowen and Smith (1977))
	953/4/5		Drawings of test excavation of sarsens I and II at Overton Down, Wiltshire (Fig 4 in Bowen and Smith (1977))

ANNEX B ISAD(G) Fonds Level Description

B.1 Reference Code

MS 953.

B.2 Title

Wessex Sarsen Stone Survey.

B.3 Date

1974-1993.

B.4 Level of Description

Fonds.

B.5 Extent and medium

5 boxes, 2 map folders, stone samples (unknown number).

B.6 Creator

The Society of Antiquaries of London.

B.7 Administrative history

The Society of Antiquaries of London is a learned society founded in 1707 and established by Royal Charter in 1751. The Society exists to promote archaeological and historical research. Its objectives and Statement of Values are available at <https://www.sal.org.uk/about-us/>. A sub-committee of the Society's Research Committee was established in 1973 with the purpose of promoting research into the long-term history of landscape organisation. That sub-committee instituted the

Evolution of the Landscape Project, the first activity of which was the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* project.

B.8 Archival history

The *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* project archive material for the counties of Dorset and Wiltshire was collated and archived at the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1977. The archive material for Hampshire was deposited in 1993.

B.9 Immediate source of transfer

n/a

B.10 Scope and content

This fonds consists of documentary and photographic archive relating to the *Sarsen Stones in Wessex* survey. It includes the project's initial period of data capture from 1974 to 1977; the results publication; and later data capture (in Hampshire) into the 1980s. The fonds contains MSS field records, typescript documentation, maps, transparencies, photographs, and publication drawings.

B.11 Appraisal, destruction and scheduling

n/a

B.12 Accruals

No future accruals are expected.

B.13 System of arrangement

The fonds is ordered in four series.

B.14 Conditions governing access

Conditions of access are described <https://www.sal.org.uk/library/manuscripts-and-archives/>

B.15 Conditions governing reproduction

Conditions of image supply and reproduction are described <https://www.sal.org.uk/library/library-image-services/>

B.16 Language

English.

B.17 Physical characteristics and technical requirements

Some material in the fonds requires rehousing in suitable archival storage, and conservation intervention is required on material damaged by inappropriate use of rubber bands to hold items together.

B.18 Finding aids

The fonds is referenced at series level in *Access to Archives* <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/N13999634>. A typescript hand-list is available.

B.19 Existence and location of originals

This fonds comprises original material.

B.20 Existence and location of copies

The fonds, except the Hampshire records MS953/3/2, has been microfiched and is available as a RCHME Microfiche in the Historic England Archive. Material in series 953/3 is duplicated in the Hampshire Record Office (113M93).

B.21 Related units of description

None known.

B.22 Publication note

Bowen and Smith (1977).

B.23 Note

n/a

B.24 Archivist's note

Description prepared by Katy A. Whitaker.

B.25 Rules or conventions

Description based on General International Standard Archive Description (Second Edition) "Rules for Archival Description (Fonds)".

B.26 Date of description

Description prepared January 2017, revised October 2017.

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