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Proposal to allow recording the holders of offices, titles and land

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Description: ■is paper proposes a structured mechanism for recording the ownership of land, and the holders of titles and offices.

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Abstract

This paper proposes a structured mechanism for recording the ownership of land, and the holders of titles and offices. A new type of entity is proposed called an *hereditament*, with subtypes tailored for property and offices. The transfer of ownership of an hereditament is recorded by a *transfer event* which may be linked to a causing event, such as a death. The difficulty in recording two distinct periods of ownership is discussed, and compared to a similar problem documenting the period of a marriage. A resolution to this is required by an eventual substantive proposal for an event data model. Finally a use of this mechanism is suggested in the recording of regnal numbers.

1 Introduction

Land and property can sometimes pass through several generations of a family, even if it is only an obscure copyhold messuage, and tracing this can be a useful tool to genealogists. Amongst the aristocracy, titles such as peerages are typically inherited under well-defined rules, and the recording this can be an important part of an aristocratic genealogy. In the lesser gentry, lordships of manors, seigneuries and, in some jurisdictions, knighthoods are inherited. In some cultures, certain other offices have been hereditary, and a genealogist working with a family that held such office may find it useful or interesting to record this.

The GEDCOM standard provides limited facilities for recording this [1]. The `PROP` tag stores a list of property (including real estate) owned by an individual, but its value is simply an unstructured piece of text. That leaves an application unable reliably to query a dataset to find, for instance, all the listed owners of a particular farm. The `RESI` tag allows more structured recording of an individual's place residence, but residency and ownership are different things. There are also `TITL` and `OCCU` tags for recording a title and an occupation, but they too are unstructured text.

This paper proposes that land ownership, titles and offices should be considered first-rate entities in a genealogical data model. In order to describe this proposal it is convenient to have a general term encompassing land being owned, a title or an office, and this paper provisionally uses *hereditament* for that purpose.

This paper does not propose that this mechanism to be used for storing occupations or places of residence.

2 Hereditaments

The types of hereditament that are covered by this proposal are those where it is held by someone for a well-defined period (albeit perhaps ones that is not fully unknown to a modern-day researcher). They are typically things that convey some advantage, financial or social, on the holder; and, at least in theory, they are things of which the holder can be deprived. The word "hereditament" should be taken to imply any control by the holder on who will succeed to it: a duke has no control over who will succeed him, but the dukedom is still an hereditament.

Typically only a specified finite number of people can hold an hereditament at a given time. Most commonly this is just one, but for others like "Senator of Connecticut" or "Knight of the Shire for Yorkshire" it would be more. (These offices would usually not be termed hereditaments, but they qualify for the purpose of this paper. Perhaps a better term can be found.) Sometimes an hereditament might be shared, for example a house that might be jointly and equally owned by two individuals. It usually makes sense to talk of a person's successor or predecessor to the hereditament.

In the terminology of CFPS 4 [2], hereditments should be thing nodes, much like people, places and events. A new form of connection, perhaps called *held*, should be used to link a person node to the node representing the hereditament. In the statement formalism of CFPS 77, this would be a statement with a "held" predicate [3]. Holding an hereditament is time-dependent, insofar as an individual who held it at one time may not have held it at a later or earlier time. The proposal for recording time-dependent data in CFPS 95 is therefore relevant [4]. This paper does not address the question of how to handle shared ownership.

This paper defines two subtypes of hereditament, namely: *property* and *office*. Property means a physical, tangible property, such a field or house. An office is an intangible job or title, such as MP for Huntingdon, or Emperor of China.

Hereditaments will typically have several properties associated with them. In the terminology of CFPS 4 they will be in property nodes. This paper defines several properties (all of which are optional). An hereditament may have a *title* such as "Copyhold of Barn Farm" or "Emperor of Germany", and it may also have a *description* allowing sundry other information to be stored for the convenience of the researcher. These property names are both chosen to be aligned with the Dublin Core metadata terms [5]. It may have a *place* associated with it. For property, this is the physical location of the property; for an office, this is the place, if any, associated with a title or office. For example, the location associated with the "Duke of Devonshire" is the English county of Devon, even though the ancestral seat of the Dukes of Devonshire is Chatsworth House in Derbyshire.

3 Transfer events

This paper further proposes a new event type called a *transfer event*, that records the event of an hereditament being transferred from one holder to another. There is not currently a detailed proposal for the representation of events before the FHISO. (The two main papers on the subject, CFPS 24 [6] and CFPS 89 [7], though informative and thought-provoking, do not yet have the requisite level of detail to constitute firm proposals.) However it is assumed that all events will include optional links to *(i)* the date, *(ii)* the place, and *(iii)* the participants.

Presumably they may also have type-specific properties, and this paper proposes a *hereditament* property that links to the associated hereditament object. Where multiple hereditaments are transferred at the same time between the same individuals (as might happen when a child inherits several things from a parent), it makes sense to have multiple *hereditament* properties.

A transfer event generally has two participants: an *outgoing holder* and an *incoming holder*. In cases were an hereditament (typically an office) had more than one holder, several holders changed simultaneously, and there was no pairing between specific incoming and outgoing holders, it makes sense to merge them into a single transfer event with multiple incoming and outgoing holders. This might be the case with a Roman consul.

The transfer event's date is, self-evidently enough, the date of the transfer. Frequently, the place will be unknown or not applicable, and should be omitted. If a place is given, then it is place at which the transfer occurred; it is not the place associated with the hereditament. For example, if the hereditament is a copyhold of a farm, the transfer event would probably have occurred at the local manorial court, possibly based some distant away, rather than at the farm.

On occasion, an office will have been transferred twice (or more times) on a single day. Some means of ordering the events is needed as a specific time will rarely be known. The proposal in CFPS 15 provides a means of recording the order of two event relative to each other without knowing their precise times [8].

One aim of the transfer event framework is that it is possible for an application to trace the sequence of holders of a given office simply by following the chain of incoming and outgoing holders. In this respect the proposal is defective: if there is an transfer event showing Henry VI as the incoming King of England in 1422, and another transfer event showing him outgoing in 1471, this does not imply that he was monarch for the whole period 1422–71, and in fact he was not. A less esoteric example of the same problem is a person selling the freehold of a house and later buying it back.

A similar problem exists for marriages: if someone marries and gets divorced,

remarries the same person, and later dies, these four events need linking into two separate periods of marriage. This paper does not propose a solution, not least due to absence of a substantive proposal for representing events. Instead this paper raises this as a functional requirement for the representation of events.

Sometimes it is useful to record that a transfer event occurred as a direct result of some other event. For example, that a property was transferred as a result of death or probate. This paper proposes a *caused by* connection to perform this link.

4 Royal and noble titles

Royal genealogy has requirements that are not normally present elsewhere. One of these is names. James Stuart is more commonly referred to as "James II, King of England", and a genealogist wanting to document his ancestry would probably wish to record him as such. A general solution to names is, as CFPS 21 demonstrates [9], exceedingly complicated and this paper only addresses one aspect of it, and then only partially.

In this example, "King of England" is the value of the title property on the office, and should not be regarded as part of his name. However it is closely related to to his regnal number, which should be regarded as part of his name. This paper suggests that the regnal number component of his name be linked (by an unspecified mechanism) to the office. A second source might refer to the same individual as "James VII, King of Scotland", and in this case the regnal number would be linked to a different office.

Several variants of office's title may be required depending on the sex (and in other cultures, perhaps other attributes) of the holder. "King of England" only applied to male holders of the office; for women the title was "Queen of England". An application may choose to use this when displaying the holder's name. This paper leaves unspecified how the variants are denoted or the correct one selected. It may be enough to somehow tag the titles with "male" or "female", or a more general selector language might be deemed appropriate.

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