



Durham County Record Office

Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2021 to 2024

Author	Owner	Approval body
Lindsey Gibson, Archive Conservator	Liz Bregazzi, County Archivist	Head of Transformation

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Collections Care and Conservation Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy forms part of the suite of policies relating specifically to the collections held by Durham County Record Office (DCRO). It should be read in conjunction with the Collections Management Policy, which describes the statutory and legal basis for DCRO, the preservation and management of its collections, the framework of standards within which it operates and the code of ethics followed by staff caring for and conserving the collections.
- 1.2 Our Collections Care and Conservation Policy outlines our strategic approach in caring for and conserving our archive collections, to ensure they will be available for future generations to use and enjoy. It provides a comprehensive statement on the preservation of the archive collections and communicates the principles that guide the conservation activities necessary for their long-term protection and security.
- 1.3 Our Collections Care and Conservation Policy provides a framework to aid managerial decisions on future development, a source of information to staff who share a common responsibility in caring for the collections, a statement of commitment to archive users and depositors, a supporting document to facilitate funding applications, and a benchmark to improve standards and measure performance.

2. Context

- 2.1 Durham County Record Office is the statutory local authority archive service for County Durham. We also act under agreement as the archive authority for Darlington Borough Council and as the Durham Diocesan Record Office for Parish Records. DCRO is an Accredited Archive Service, appointed as a place of deposit for public records by The National Archives.
- 2.2 Our mission statement:
Durham County Record Office collects, conserves, secures and makes accessible historical records relating to County Durham and Darlington to enable learning and education, business operations, local accountability, and personal enrichment.

3. Scope

- 3.1 This policy applies to all records managed by our service both analogue and digital: Durham County Council (DCC) and Darlington Borough Council corporate records, and records offered to us as archives by other organisations or individuals.

4. Policy principles

- 4.1 DCRO stores archival material, whatever its nature or format, in secure and suitable accommodation with appropriate environmental conditions.
- 4.2 We aspire to follow relevant national standards and best practice, and a professional code of ethics, in all aspects of collections care and conservation. We are working to improve standards in existing facilities, and planning for the future.
- 4.3 We adopt a risk management approach to collections care and conservation, undertaking condition surveys and assessment followed by appropriate remedial action.
- 4.4 We carry out remedial conservation work, using appropriate techniques to stabilise and slow down further deterioration with the minimum of intervention.
- 4.5 We provide access to archives, while ensuring their protection and minimising the risk from handling.
- 4.6 We care for our born-digital collections in accordance with our Digital Preservation Policy.

5. Policy requirements

- 5.1 Accommodation for the archive collections
We aim to fulfil the requirements of BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections.
 - 5.1.1 Fire detection and prevention
The archive collections are housed in secure storage areas: archive strongrooms. DCC's Facilities Management Service inspects and maintains the buildings regularly and routinely. Fire detection and alarm systems are in place and are maintained in line with current standards and tested and serviced regularly.

DCC's Fire Risk Assessment for the record office buildings considers the risk to the archive collections as well as to staff and visitors, and documents the measures in place to minimise the risk of fire.
 - 5.1.2 Security of the archive collections
The security of the DCRO collections is the responsibility of all staff. Appropriate levels of security minimise the risk of vandalism and theft. Security lighting is in place, and exterior surveillance by video-recording cameras monitored by DCC. An intruder alarm is linked to an external security agency. All doors are fitted with appropriate locks. Access to the staff and strongroom areas is restricted to relevant staff and operated by keys which are kept in a secure location. Visitors and contractors are supervised at all times when in archive strongrooms.

We provide lockers for visitors to secure their personal possessions, and ensure that no large items and bags are brought into the searchroom. Visitors consulting original documents are supervised at all times by DCRO staff.

The security of digital archives is covered by the Durham County Council ICT Services Information Security Policy and Security Incident Management Process.

5.1.3 Environmental control and monitoring

We aim to provide environmental conditions which conform to BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections.

In 5 out of our 8 strongrooms, the environment is controlled by a bespoke air conditioning system. We monitor continuously and regularly review the environmental conditions within all storage areas to ensure acceptable and stable conditions are maintained.

HEPA filters on air supply reduce the risk of airborne particulate pollutants.

In order to reduce the risk of damage by UV light the archive storage areas have no windows and lights are turned off when stores are not in use. Windows in public and staff working areas are fitted with vertical blinds.

5.1.4 Housekeeping

We recognise the importance of a safe clean environment in storage areas and the value of good housekeeping in collections care. All strongrooms are cleaned regularly, on a cyclical rota. We train staff and volunteers to clean storage areas in a way that is not detrimental to the collections.

5.1.5 Pest monitoring

We monitor document storage areas using sticky insect traps, checking them regularly. If we discover pests, these are examined and identified, so that the risk posed to the collections can be accurately assessed. If and when a problem is discovered, we monitor the affected area to ensure that the source of the problem is identified. Appropriate action is then taken to eradicate the pests. We document all monitoring and remedial action.

5.1.6 Packaging and storage of the archive collections

Proper cleaning, packaging and storage reduces the risk of damage to the archive collections.

We check new acquisitions for damp, mould and insect infestation and take appropriate action before locating them in the main storage areas, to minimise the risk of contaminating the collections.

Collections are housed in protective low acid/acid free boxes and acid free folders or envelopes and outsize material is specially supported and or wrapped.

We store archives in strongrooms according to their physical nature and condition - on shelves, in cabinets and boxes as appropriate for their format. The location of items is clearly indicated by shelf signs and labels, and we keep a database of all locations.

5.1.7 Records in Transit

In the exceptional circumstances in which we move archives, we minimise the time in which they are out of proper storage conditions. We transport them in appropriate containers, secure in a van or car boot, or using specialist art carriers. We ensure that appropriate insurance cover is in place for all archives whilst in transit.

5.2 Remedial Conservation

Remedial conservation is essential for the long-term survival and accessibility of the archive collections.

At DCRO, remedial conservation is carried out by trained and qualified archive conservators or by those trained by, and under the direct supervision of, archive conservators. It is undertaken in accordance with health and safety requirements and appropriate risk assessments, and following nationally recognised ethical and technical standards - especially BS 4971:2017 *Conservation and Care of Archive and Library Collections*, *The Institute of Conservation's Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics*, and the European Confederation of Conservators-Restorers Organisations (ECCO) *Professional Guidelines and Code of Ethics*.

The Archive Conservator carries out condition surveys and audits to inform the direction of conservation work. By identifying archives likely to deteriorate because of chemical or mechanical damage, we can determine future conservation priorities.

We prioritise individual items for treatment depending on user demand, the context of the item within the collection, or its physical condition.

We assess material before carrying out conservation work, to determine the most appropriate treatment.

We carry out remedial conservation treatments with the minimum of intervention to retain the integrity and authenticity of the item. The future storage format, storage location and anticipated use of the item also influence the level of treatment applied.

We record all conservation treatments and examinations and include photographic documentation where appropriate. Conservation documentation is stored in a central location on the DCRO server.

5.3 Access and Handling

We welcome people from all sectors of the community and aim to provide access for everyone in accordance with our Access Policy.

We make catalogued archives available to all users for consultation in appropriately controlled and supervised conditions, and in accordance with the current Searchroom Rules. We may produce uncatalogued material or archives deemed to be at risk in their present format under supervision, if deemed appropriate after risk assessment.

Access to some archives is restricted by legislation, the reasonable wishes of the depositor and the physical condition of the item.

We support the use of surrogate copies and make them available where the condition of the original material is unstable, or where current or anticipated use will pose a threat to its survival. We require researchers to use surrogate copies where available to minimise handling and reduce the risk of further damage to the original.

Staff and volunteers are trained in handling archives and promote best practice in the searchroom. We provide researchers with appropriate aids, such as book cushions, protective polyester sheets, and a variety of weights, to protect books and archives, and demonstrate how to use them.

We recognise the value of using digital technology to increase access to archives and safeguard the collections. Our archive catalogues are available remotely through our website. An increasing number of archive images are also being made available online. Digitisation is carried out in line with our Digitisation Policy.

We supply analogue and digital copies of documents to provide remote access in accordance with our Copying Policy.

We recognise both the benefits of displaying archives and the risks of exhibiting original material. We minimise the quantity of original material on display. Material from the archive collections is made available for exhibition in line with national and professional standards. We require institutions and individuals borrowing original material to provide evidence of suitable insurance provision and security, buildings and environmental conditions in line with nationally recognised standards. Loans must be arranged in advance, and the document must be deemed fit for loan by the Archive Conservator. DCRO reserves the right to reject loan requests for items which are damaged, vulnerable or otherwise at risk.

5.4 Disaster planning

We recognise that effective emergency preparedness is vital to ensure the protection and safety of staff and the sustainability of the collections in whatever format.

We maintain an Emergency Plan in line with the DCC corporate framework. The Emergency Plan is based on a risk management approach to ensure protection of the buildings, archive collections and staff as well as the most

appropriate response to recover archival holdings and make provision for business continuity in the event of an emergency. The Emergency Plan covers physical collections. The DCC ICT Business Continuity plan covers digital assets. A copy of the Business continuity plan is stored with the Emergency Plan. The plan provides for staff training and testing. We review the plan annually.

We subscribe to Harwell Document Restoration Service, which in the event of a disaster will provide recovery and emergency salvage services.

We maintain a supply of disaster and recovery equipment and check and monitor all items at least annually.

6. Standards

- 6.1 The Collections Care and Conservation policy is underpinned by the following standards and methodologies:
- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections
 - EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage - Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections
 - PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management
 - Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries, A Self-assessment Checklist, The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, 2018
 - European Confederation of Conservators-Restorers Organisations (ECCO) Professional Guidelines and Code of Ethics.
 - The Institute of Conservation's Professional Standards and Judgement & Ethics (2020)

7. Roles and responsibilities

- 7.1 DCC Corporate Management Team is responsible for approving the corporate framework for the preservation of archival records as set out in this policy.
- 7.2 DCC Corporate Directors are responsible for developing service guidance for the preservation of archival records.
- 7.3 DCC Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to enable compliance with the Collections Care and Conservation Policy.
- 7.4 Individual Employees are responsible for the records they create and will follow service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records. DCC owns the information that individual employees create.

- 7.5 The County Archivist and the Archive Conservator are responsible for developing the Collections Care and Conservation Policy and for ensuring that it is implemented, monitored and reviewed.
- 7.6 The County Archivist is responsible for ensuring that there is adequate funding for collections care and conservation at DCRO and sufficient trained staff with appropriate knowledge to accomplish long-term objectives in this area.
- 7.7 The Archive Conservator is responsible for planning and carrying out collections care, preservation and conservation activities that support the aims of this policy. Tasks are planned and prioritised in liaison with the County Archivist.
- 7.8 Archive service staff are responsible for identifying and recording collection preservation and conservation needs.
- 7.9 Collections care and conservation staff are expected to continually review their conservation practice in the light of ongoing research and development in the field, and to interpret the Collections Care and Conservation Policy according to professional standards of current thinking and practice.

8. Communication

- 8.1 The Collections Care and Conservation Policy will be published on the DCRO website.
- 8.2 We provide advice and guidance on best practice and the importance of collections care to DCC services, outside organisations and institutions, community groups, owners of private archives and the general public.
- 8.3 We communicate an understanding of the nature and value of archives and the importance of collections care and appropriate conservation through our outreach activities and in exhibitions, publications and information leaflets.
- 8.4 We support and develop staff to deliver high quality services and train all staff and volunteers in handling archives and in safe working practices.
- 8.5 We maintain active professional relationships with the archival and preservation communities and organisations in the UK, including the Archives and Records Association and the Institute of Conservation.

9. Audit

- 9.1 DCRO will develop procedures to enable the effective monitoring of the Collections Care and Conservation Policy.

10. Risk Management

10.1 Without a policy and procedures to manage collections care and conservation, there are a series of risks:

- Damage to or loss of historically important records resulting from physical forces: incorrect handling, inappropriate remedial treatment, insufficient/inappropriate packaging for transport or storage.
- Damage or loss due to the action of thieves or vandals.
- Damage or loss due to fire, flood, leak, water incursion or utility failure.
- Damage or loss due to poor housekeeping and inadequate condition checks on new acquisitions resulting in mould/pest infestation.
- Damage or loss due to physical/chemical deterioration resulting from the action of atmospheric pollutants; light; incorrect temperature and/or humidity in an inappropriate storage or display environment.
- Loss of digital records due to inadequate preservation systems and procedures.
- Accusations of poor management of collections and bad public relations/damage to reputation. In particular, existing or potential depositors and donors may reconsider or revoke decisions about their collections if they think there is a risk of loss or damage to items due to inappropriate/negligent conservation, storage and or use.
- Trust. Archive services that do not manage the preservation and conservation of their collections efficiently and ethically, risk losing the support of their community. This community includes a range of stakeholders including users, depositors and funders.

11. Review

We will review this policy every three years.

12. Contacts

Liz Bregazzi, County Archivist, Durham County Record Office, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UL. Tel: (03000) 267 620. E-mail: record.office@durham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Glossary

Archive: a group of records created by an organisation or individual in the course of daily activities but no longer needed by them for regular reference. The individual records in an archive can vary in format but each is a combination of a medium and the information recorded on or in it; for example single sheets of paper with typed or handwritten text, maps, bound volumes, photographic negatives and prints, audio-visual recordings and digital documents/files.

Born-digital: materials that are created in digital form and that are not intended to have an analogue equivalent.

Collections Care: the management of all risks to the collections, including those from the collection items themselves and other collection items, physical forces, thieves and vandals, dissociation, fire, water, pests, pollutants, light, incorrect temperature and incorrect humidity

Conservation: the direct application of interventive remedial treatment and non-interventive preventive measures to arrest material deterioration, and promote the physical preservation and accessibility of an item or collection.

Preservation: the retention and maintenance of material over time.

Appendix 2: Statutory Position and Standards

Durham County Council has a statutory duty to provide an archives service, to preserve and make accessible archives in whatever format they may be created.

Relevant legislation:

- Public Records Act 1958
- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations Act 2004
- Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978
- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
- The Manorial Documents Rules 1926
- The Tithe (Copies of Instruments of Appropriation) Rules 1960

Standards that are relevant to the management of all archives:

- Archive Service Accreditation Standard 2013
- British Standard for archive storage BS 4971:2017
- Information and Records Management Society Retention guidelines for Local Authorities 2003