



Durham County Record Office

Collections Information Policy 2021 to 2024

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Contents

Collections Information Policy	3
1. Purpose.....	3
2. Context.....	3
3. Scope	3
4. Policy Principles	3
5. Policy requirements	4
6. Standards	6
7. Roles and responsibilities	6
8. Communication.....	7
9. Audit	7
10. Risk Management	7
11. Review	7
12. Contacts.....	8
Appendix 1: Glossary.....	9
Appendix 2: Statutory Position and Standards	10

Collections Information Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Our collections information policy exists to demonstrate that Durham County Record Office (DCRO) maintains accurate documentation for our archive collections.
- 1.2 Our policy takes into account recommendations of The National Archives for collections information.
- 1.3 It should be read alongside our other policies, in particular our Collecting Policy, Collections Management Policy and our Digital Preservation Policy.

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 and Darlington Borough Council corporate records and records offered to us as archives by other organisations or individuals.

4. Policy Principles

- 4.1 We recognise that good documentation of our collections is fundamental to collections management and to good public access.
- 4.2 We work towards meeting common international standards and principles governing the creation of catalogues for archives.
- 4.3 Accessioning and cataloguing procedures are documented in a staff manual.

5. Policy requirements

5.1 Our collections information falls into four categories:

- Accessioning information
- Catalogue information
- Finding aids
- Locations information

5.2 Accessioning

5.2.1 Crucial to preserving the integrity and authenticity of County Durham and Darlington's written heritage, we record the provenance of archive donations, bequests, long-term loans and purchases. The accession register records:

- Contact details of source.
- Date of accessioning.
- Unique accession number.
- Catalogue reference number.
- Brief indication of scope, content and creation dates of collection.
- Legal status and terms of transfer.
- Any restrictions on access or copying.
- Instructions for disposal of material appraised as not for permanent preservation.
- Physical extent in linear metres.

5.2.3 We encourage good relationships with donors and depositors, and ascertain as much information as possible about the collection at the point of accessioning. This helps us to process the records within an accurate context. Terms of deposit of some collections transferred in the past are unclear, and we investigate these on a case by case basis if queries arise. We actively maintain contact with owners of our most significant collections, and publish Terms of Deposit on our website.

5.2.4 Our accessions register is kept in hard copy, in archive strongrooms, for preservation purposes, and in a database for easy access. It contains details of all accessions since DCRO was created in 1961.

5.2.5 The accession register is confidential, and details are not disclosed to third parties without permission.

5.2.6 We supply an annual report of accessions to The National Archives.

5.2.7 Where an accession is not to be catalogued in the short term, its details are added to our LOGJAM database (an archival collections assessment tool) to help staff make informed judgements about prioritising collections for cataloguing.

5.3 Cataloguing

5.3.1 Cataloguing is essential to enable effective collections management and to facilitate access. DCRO coordinates cataloguing through a strategic, managed and flexible approach, taking into account actual or predicted

demand, size and complexity of collections, archival significance, potential for learning and outreach, potential for external funding and potential for uploading images to our online catalogue.

5.3.2 All new cataloguing conforms to current professional standards. Older catalogues may not meet these standards, and work is ongoing to update and improve them.

5.3.3 Catalogues are created with the following elements:

- Reference number
- Title
- Creator (person/organisation responsible for creating the records) and context
- Covering dates
- Description (we aim for detailed descriptions wherever possible)
- Any restrictions on access
- Physical description
- Conservation notes

5.3.4 All completed catalogues are uploaded to our website. In some cases, interim or box lists are uploaded to our website to facilitate access. We also have an ongoing programme to upload low resolution images to our online catalogue.

5.4 **Cataloguing backlog**

5.4.1 In common with many archive services in the UK, DCRO has a growing accumulation of archive collections that have not been catalogued, together with collections that were not fully appraised when received. During periods of local government reorganisation and austerity, the priority to appraise records on or before arrival has had to compete with the immediate need to save records at risk. This material is accessible only with difficulty, and may include material more suitable for transfer to another repository or disposal.

5.4.2 Our strategy to reduce this backlog is:

- Use LOGJAM as a baseline of uncatalogued collections and to help prioritise.
- Explore possibilities for internal and external funding to increase staff capacity.
- Appraise some collections or parts of collections for deaccessioning following our Deaccessioning Policy.

5.5 **Finding aids**

5.5.1 We recognise the value of indexes to facilitate access for users and for staff. In consultation with the Friends of DCRO and in response to archive enquiries, we prioritise which collections to index. Volunteers index those collections and the indexes are available in our search room, some also on our website.

5.5.2 To facilitate access, we also develop and maintain a number of finding aids specific to collections, for example:

- A church registers database to make it easier to find a particular church or register.
- A detailed place name index compiled from 1st edition Ordnance Survey plans.
- Details of collieries in County Durham, including dates of operation and ownership.
- Mining Durham's Hidden Depths, an index to miners named in the Durham Miners' Association records and other collections.
- A timeline of Durham Light Infantry battalions from inception in 1756 until disbandment in 1968.

5.5.3 To help users and staff to identify records relevant to their research, we produce a number of information guides. Further details are available on our website: <http://www.durhamrecordoffice.org.uk/our-records/information-guides/>

5.6 Locations information

5.6.1 Crucial to being able to find our collections, we record the location of every document in our collections. This records the strongroom, bay, shelf and box where each item is kept.

5.6.2 We store archives according to their physical format and size, so locations information is essential.

5.6.3 We record the information on a database, and keep hard copies of the information for preservation purposes and ease of access. One member of staff, to maintain accuracy, supervises the locations database. We retain superseded versions in hard copy, as a check against mistakes.

5.6.4 Document Request Slips are completed in triplicate for all productions of records from storage, retained as a record of retrievals, and used for collections management and statistical purposes.

6. Standards

6.1 See Appendix 2 for statutory position.

6.2 The policy is underpinned by:

- the requirements of the Archive Service Accreditation Standard, 2013
- the principles of the International Council on Archives General International Standard of Archival Description (ISAD (G))
- PAS 197:2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management

7. Roles and responsibilities

7.1 DCC Corporate Management Team is responsible for approving the corporate framework for the preservation of semi-current and archival records as set out in this policy.

- 7.2 DCC Corporate Directors are responsible for developing service guidance for the preservation of semi-current and archival records.
- 7.3 DCC Heads of Services are responsible for ensuring that appropriate resources are in place to enable compliance with the Collections Information 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 is responsible for DCRO's Collections Information Policy, and will provide guidance and support to services and elected members in order to support its aims.
- 7.6 The Collections Information Policy will apply to records created by Elected Members as part of their Council work.

8. Communication

- 8.1 The Collections Information Policy will be published on the DCRO website.

9. Audit

- 9.1 DCRO will develop procedures to enable the effective monitoring of the Collections Information Policy.

10. Risk Management

- 10.1 Without a policy and procedures to manage collections information, there are a series of risks:
- The legal status of collections may be unclear.
 - Access to collections may be severely restricted.
 - We may not be able to find documents.

11. Review

We will review this policy every three years.

12. Contacts

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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.

Accessioning: the process of bringing archives under the intellectual and custodial control of a preservation environment.

Appraisal: the process of deciding whether an item or group of items has continuing value in accordance with the collecting organisation's mission statement.

Cataloguing: the process of creating a detailed description of collective or individual items.

Disposal: the physical act of transferring the collection or item from the archive service to another destination. This covers transfer to another repository, return to depositor or donor and, as a last resort, destruction.

Finding aids: enhanced means of accessing relevant collections.

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 play an important role in appraisal. 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