

# Collections Information Policy

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Westmorland  
& Furness  
Council

Working for Cumberland Council and  
Westmorland & Furness Council

## **Collections Information Policy**

### **Introduction**

Maintaining accurate documentation of our collections of archival holdings is central to the purpose of Cumbria Archives. This information forms two parts: accessioning information, and cataloguing information both of which are collected and stored using a specialist archives Collection Management System (CMS).

Cumbria Archives recognises that good documentation of its collections is fundamental to management of records in our care and to good public access. We apply this policy to accessioning and cataloguing of archives in our four Archive Centres and outstore. Cumbria Archives works towards meeting common international standards and principles governing the creation of catalogues for archives. It is committed to working with partners to adopt and employ agreed standards of documentation which ensure maximum interoperability and sharing of metadata. Staff members work to internal procedural guidelines as well as external policies and legislation in their collections information work.

### **Accessioning**

Recording the provenance of material within Cumbria Archives' custody is a crucial part of preserving the integrity of Cumbria's archival heritage. Cumbria Archives will accession every donation, loan, purchase, and bequest of records, in order to achieve this. This accession record will give a preliminary indication of the scope, content, and creation dates of the collection, record its legal status, any restrictions on access, its size (cubic capacity and linear feet), as well as the contact details of its source, date of accession, and holding Archive Centre. Deposits received under the Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, Public Records Acts, and Manorial Documents Rules are included in this system.

Cumbria Archives records and retains this accession information on its CMS. This contains details of all accessions from April 1999 and incorporates imported legacy data from all hard-copy accession registers for Barrow (from 1975), Kendal (from 1962) and Whitehaven (from 1996) as well as data from Carlisle for the period from September 1995. Hard-copy registers remain the record of accessions before September 1995 in Carlisle, but work is ongoing to transfer this information into the CMS. The accession registers are not made available for public searching on our online catalogue. Appraisal of county council records is conducted jointly as a group of archivists. The Council has a retention schedule on the intranet to help staff appraise records, and we can discuss decisions on issues not covered by the retention schedule at the appraisal sessions.

A formal receipt for every donation, loan and bequest will be issued, requiring the counter-signature of the depositor, donor, or executor/ administrator of the estate. This receipt is supplied with a copy of Cumbria Archives' 'Terms of Deposit', available as a separate

document, and is legally binding. An electronic copy of the issued receipt as well as the hard-copy returned signed receipt are both retained within the office's respective filing systems. The unique number assigned to each accession will subsequently be linked to the catalogue record. The full detail of the accession, including depositor or donor's contact details, will not be made available to the public. Historic catalogues still retain depositor names and an indication of residence.

The *Appraisal* field in the CMS is used to record actions relating to the evaluation of the accession for permanent retention, as well as the quantities of any material confidentially disposed of. The *Copyright* field records any specific information relating to any known intellectual property rights; where no information is given staff are guided by the terms of Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and the Copyright and Related Rights Regulations 2003. Cumbria Archives uses the *Priority* field to establish the significance locally, regionally and nationally of uncatalogued collections. This facility, in conjunction with the LOGJAM methodology (an archival collections assessment tool), enables staff to make more informed judgements when it comes to prioritising collections for cataloguing.

Integral to the accessioning process is the management of information relating to the source of the material. This is retained in the database of Depositors in the CMS, whilst for all historic deposits contact names and addresses are in the individual Archive Centre accession registers. Combined with information in the Legal Status field, this supplies the detail needed to authenticate ownership and the legal status of collections held.

Cumbria Archives encourages good relationships with depositors and donors of archives. We welcome all relevant information regarding a collection that owners can supply at the point of accession. This enables us to process the records with accurate context. The ownership status of a number of smaller collections deposited a long time ago is unclear because the depositor has not kept in contact or has died. Mindful of such legacy issues, Cumbria Archive Service strives to retain ongoing contact with depositors and actively works to retain contact with depositors of the most significant collections. Work converting accession registers into our CMS allows these legacy issues to be addressed on an ongoing basis. Our 'Terms of Deposit' now actively encourage the notification of changes of ownership.

Information about new accessions is shared with users in a number of ways. Once catalogued and accessible, new collections will be publicised in our own social media platforms and in the publications of local historical societies. A summary of major new additions in the last year appears on CASCAT, our online catalogue. Annual accession reports are supplied to The National Archives, and relevant material notified to the Manorial Documents Register.

## **Cataloguing**

Cataloguing the material within Cumbria Archives' custody is essential to enable staff to effectively manage the information retained for permanent preservation within the Archive Centres, and to enable public access as appropriate. Cumbria Archives coordinates cataloguing through its service plan to achieve a strategic, managed and flexible approach to creating new and improved information about the collections in its care, whether this be traditional archive collections or born digital archives.

All new cataloguing conforms to current professional standards, namely the principles and mandatory elements of the General International Standard of Archival Description (ISAD(G)), and the requirements of Cumbria Archives' CMS. Older catalogues may not meet these standards and work is ongoing to update and improve these.

The fundamental multilevel description rules outlined in ISAD(G) specify:

- Description from the general to the specific
- Information relevant to the level of description
- Linking of descriptions
- Non-repetition of information

The six essential elements of any catalogue are as follows:

- Reference number(s)
- Title
- Creator (ie person/organisation responsible for creating the records)
- Covering date(s)
- Extent (normally given in cubic metres or description of physical unit)
- Level of description

In order to make finding information as easy as possible Cumbria Archives also records the Archive Centre where the collections are available, any restrictions on access (Access Conditions field) and, where digitised copies have been made, attaches low resolution images to the appropriate catalogue record in order to provide instant access to some of the collection. Some catalogue records also have embedded files such as transcripts, lists/indexes or media (sound, video) in a variety of electronic formats for further information.

Other standards used in the construction of new and revised catalogues include

- the International Standard Archival Authority *Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families* (ISAAR(CPF))
- the National Council on Archives, *Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names*
- the UK Archival Thesaurus (UKAT) for subject definitions.

These are all used to guide the consistent creation of index terms providing a wide range of entry points for the public to relevant catalogue descriptions.

Digital collections are processed in a similar fashion to physical collections. Accessions of digital files received from external sources are first virus-checked and are then profiled using The National Archives' DROID (Digital Record Object Identification) application to extract relevant technical metadata. This includes extracting a unique checksum alpha-numeric hash which can then be re-checked at period future instances for any change or corruption in the files. The files are then moved to dedicated storage on Cumbria Archives' network drives. They are then accessioned and catalogued in the usual way on the CMS and details made available on the online catalogue. If the content can be made available to researchers, the files will be delivered to researchers via email or Cumbria Archives' dedicated file sharing application.

New cataloguing will be incorporated directly into the CMS as soon as possible and documents which are available for public study will be made accessible in our Archive Centres, on public access computers and on the internet, via Cumbria Archives' online catalogue (CASCAT). In some circumstances interim box listing or volunteer cataloguing can provide more immediately a means of access to large collections, before they can be fully catalogued. These catalogues may be made available on CASCAT if not prejudicial to their security but are subject to change as work progresses. Volunteers' assistance with sorting and cataloguing and depositors' knowledge form a regular means of generating useful contextual information for the better management of our collections.

In common with many record offices in the UK, Cumbria Archives has a proportion of material which is not catalogued and also collections which were not fully appraised when received due to the amount of work involved. This material is either not accessible or accessible only with difficulty to the public and may include material more suitable for transfer or disposal. Our response to reducing this cataloguing backlog is four-fold:

1. We shall update and monitor our service-plan on an annual basis to guide priorities for cataloguing subject to staff resources.
2. We monitor our progress by the statistics which we compiled on an annual basis for the Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accounts (CIPFA) up to 2021 on our collection management (from 2022 these statistics are being compiled by The

National Archives on behalf of the Chief Archivists in Local Government Group). These include statistics on coverage of our collections by catalogues (whether online or hard-copy only) and depth/detail of cataloguing (multi-level/box level/collection level/uncatalogued) etc).

3. We shall continue to explore possibilities for internal and external funding to reduce key areas of backlog, to add to the work of the cataloguing archivists previously funded by the Best Value Improvement Plan, the Lowther Estate and for projects funded by the National Cataloguing Grants Programme.
4. We shall appraise some collections or parts of collections for de-accessioning. Each Archive Centre formulates its own plans for making local provision to tackle further assessment of the significance of such material, which will either be offered back to the depositor or, after permission is granted, disposed of confidentially. An electronic record of de-accessioned records is kept on the CMS by closing the record off from public access and inserting relevant information in the *Appraisal* field. Any paper record and/or relevant correspondence are also retained.

### **Data Protection**

Under the Data Protection Act 2018, Cumbria Archives is able to process certain personal information by archiving in the public interest for a wide range of current and potential future purposes. This covers the processing of personal data necessary to enable the identification, permanent preservation, management and, where appropriate, research and other uses of personal data in the general public interest. This includes:

- enabling research and investigation of all kinds and particularly academic historical research or genealogical research
- enabling long-term accountability, such as public inquiries and other official investigations
- enabling the discovery and availability of personal, community and corporate identity, memory and history
- enabling the establishment and maintenance of rights and obligations and of precedent decisions
- enabling educational use
- enabling commercial and non-commercial re-use.