

Collections Care Policy



Cumberland
Council



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Working for Cumberland Council and
Westmorland & Furness Council

Collections Care Policy

Mission and Commitment

Cumbria Archives is responsible for ensuring that historic documents are safely stabilised and stored for the benefit of the public today and for future generations. Documentary information is a key resource for service users and staff. It is essential if the council is to deliver a transparent, evidence-based, high-quality public service. We are committed to meeting the standards which are set out in BS4971 and EN16893. Our collections are at the core of our service. We are committed to implementing the best practical standards of collections care. In doing so, we will employ a combination of preventive and remedial conservation measures to ensure that the material culture of our area is preserved for posterity.

Policy Aims

The purpose of this Collections Care and Conservation Policy is to ensure that the holdings of Cumbria Archives are cared for and managed in a consistent and safe way. This policy provides a framework for Cumbria Archives and sets out our operational approach.

1. Overview of Current Conditions

1.1 - Surveying collections:

A British Library Preservation Assessment Survey was conducted in August 2004 with a second survey completed in January 2014, and a follow up is planned for 2024. These surveys provide Cumbria Archives with a baseline from which to measure and monitor the needs of the collection and showed the positive impact achieved by ten years of preservation and conservation work. Furthermore, all staff who produce items from the Strong rooms receive training in identifying preservation issues and these are reported to the Conservation Unit when discovered. When documents are identified as being in danger of rapid deterioration, appropriate intervention is then planned and provided. Additional surveys of the collections are undertaken as necessary by the Conservation Unit to identify priorities for the service.

1.2 – Conservation Team Structure:

The conservation team consists of one full time Senior Conservator, one full time Conservator, one part time Project Conservator, and one full time collections assistant. The Digitisation Service works alongside this team comprising one full time and one part time digitisation technicians. The Conservation Unit offers weekly sessions for the students from Northumbria University's conservation MA course, of 6 hours student per week. In addition, several volunteers are currently registered with the conservation unit. Working under the supervision of the Conservators, the volunteers attend scheduled sessions on a fortnightly basis. Each volunteer contributes between 6 and 24 hours of their time per month. They assist the Conservators with re-packaging documents, creating lists, labels and boxes. The team is based within the large, purpose-built studio at Carlisle Archive Centre, and is responsible for looking after the holdings of the other three archive centres in Barrow, Kendal and Whitehaven, and the outstore at Houghton.

1.3 - Packaging:

An ongoing project is underway which aims to increase the number of documents which are housed within archival-quality packaging materials, and to update historic packaging to current standards. Acid-free boxes, folders and wrapping papers are used, along with polyester and Tyvek® sleeves. Potentially acidic ancillary packaging materials, or those of unknown quality, are replaced if and when this is deemed appropriate. Packaging solutions are chosen for their compatibility and support for the item combined with facilitating ease of use by researchers, therefore reducing risk of handling damage.

2. Preventive Conservation

Preventative conservation describes all of the managerial, financial and technical measures which are applied to retard deterioration, prevent damage and extend the useful life of documents. These measures include scheduled deep cleaning of archive stores, sourcing and providing adequate storage and physical protection for archive items, monitoring and controlling environmental conditions to required standards, managing and controlling pest ingress in the archive stores, establishing safe handling and suitable transit procedures for archive material, creating digital surrogates, maintaining a standard of digital preservation and access, and preparing for disaster recovery by the implementation of salvage plans.

2.1 - Provision of suitable building conditions:

Archive Centre staff are tasked with ensuring that appropriate building conditions are in place for the long-term storage of the collections. Buildings are checked regularly and routinely for signs of water ingress, pests, vandalism, and structural defects. Once identified, problems are immediately reported via the building management system Concerto, where the issues are assigned to a contractor. Regular team meetings are in place to update the management team on any ongoing building issues, health and safety, and scheduled works. Fire detection and prevention systems are maintained in line with current standards and are tested and serviced regularly. When capital projects are planned the care of the collections is taken into account, and archive staff are involved in the planning process.

2.2 – Housekeeping:

- **Cleaning**

Staff and volunteers are trained in preservation cleaning. The Conservation Unit undertakes a schedule of cleaning to ensure the store rooms are maintained at a good standard. Commercial cleaning products are not used when cleaning areas where documents are kept. Only a professionally trained conservator, or a volunteer or staff member working under the direct supervision of a professionally trained conservator, will be employed to clean documents.

- **Quarantine**

New acquisitions are inspected before being allowed into the main storage areas to ensure that the introduction of pests is prevented. If pests are discovered in the collection, affected items are quarantined at Carlisle Archives, where they are treated, if possible, by freezing and cleaning in the dedicated quarantine space. This facility supports all five sites. If this is not possible, the affected records are removed from the collection, and may be treated or disposed of in accordance with the Terms of Deposit.

- **Pest Monitoring**

An integrated pest management system is in place, using blunder traps to monitor pest activity in the stores. These are checked regularly, and any pests found are examined, identified, and recorded, so that the risk posed to the collections can be accurately assessed. If and when problem is discovered, the affected area is deep cleaned and monitored to ensure that the source of the problem is identified and removed. Appropriate action is taken to eradicate pests when they are identified.

2.3 - Environmental Monitoring:

The environmental conditions within all storage and display areas are monitored continuously. Digital humidistats are used to record the temperature and relative humidity within each strong room. The data is collected and analysed on a monthly basis by a member of the Conservation Unit. This information is used to plan improvements and to implement control measures to ensure compliance with accepted standards for preservation.

2.4 - Environmental Controls:

- **Temperature and Relative Humidity Levels**

Cumbria Archives is committed to pursuing the standards of best practice which are set out in BS 4971:2017 - *Conservation and care of archive and library collections*.

In most of our strongrooms, the environment is controlled by air conditioning systems. This helps us to slow the deterioration of vulnerable and fragile documents. The climate within each of the main strongrooms is monitored by the Conservation Unit to attempt to maintain consistent temperature and humidity. In the main strongrooms at all sites the target is 13-20° Celsius (°C) , 45-60% relative humidity (RH). At Carlisle Archive Centre there are also two cold stores for storage of photographic, audio visual, and modern media. The environmental targets for these stores are 5-15° C 30-40% RH.

Professional assistance is called immediately should the environmental conditions become unstable.

- **Display Cases**

There are two Click Netherfield lockable museum display cases at Carlisle Archive Centre, placed in areas out of direct light, away from radiators and external walls. Facsimiles are preferred for long term exhibition. If we choose to create a temporary display of original material, the archivist, assisted by a conservator, selects the most suitable documents. Those chosen are then prepared and mounted appropriately. The exhibition of original material within the other archive centres is usually avoided, as the provision of adequate display cases is limited. Attractive poster displays of facsimiles are used instead.

- **Storage Enclosures**

To protect against dust, pests, and damage from accidental water ingress, holdings will be housed in standard sized acid-free boxes. Where this is not possible a Tyvek® cover or bespoke box will be used instead. Documents will be labelled and packed in a manner which reduces the need for handling. Photographs will be stored in polyester or Silver-safe® enclosures, rolled items will be protected with acid-free tissue or Tyvek®, and vulnerable unboxed material will be wrapped and stored appropriately. Ideally, two layers of packaging are used between archival material and the outside world, i.e. a folder inside a box.

2.5 – Handling:

Practicality dictates that archives must be handled by staff and by service users for research and access purposes. All of the searchrooms at Cumbria Archives are supervised by members of staff who have been trained in the safe handling of historic documents. Service users are given appropriate guidance and surrogates are employed when possible. Fragile items are identified and withheld from public access, and conservation treatment and digitisation are scheduled as resources permit.

2.6 - Education:

The conservation unit is involved in training at all levels, from advising staff and researchers about how to handle documents correctly and safely, to detailed training on disaster response and salvage. Many of the tour groups who visit Carlisle Archive Centre come into the studio. We work alongside Northumbria University Conservation MA to provide workplace training for their students every year.

2.7 - Records in Transit:

Detailed guidance on storage, display and transport of items is available in our staff guidance, and our Loans and Exhibitions Policy.

From time to time, it is necessary to transport documents to a different location, i.e. between archive centres, or to and from the Conservation Unit. Occasionally, original records are requested by an external organisation to form part of an exhibition. Short term loans such as this must be arranged in advance, and a comprehensive condition report, including photographs, must be

completed on loan and on return. In addition, the borrower must guarantee that the document will be handled by trained persons only, and stored in a suitable and secure environment, specified on a case-by-case basis by the Conservation Unit. Cumbria Archives reserves the right to reject loan requests for items which are damaged, vulnerable, or otherwise at risk.

- **Personnel**

Archive staff may transport documents between sites using their own car or a suitable self-drive hire vehicle. The County Council has relevant health and safety policies and provides guidance and training to drivers. A comprehensive policy on the safe transport and storage of archive material is available to all staff.

- **Training**

As part of the induction process Cumbria Archives staff members are given training with regard to the safe and appropriate handling of historic records. Refresher courses, led by a member of the conservation unit, are held periodically. Guidance notes are available in the searchrooms. When dealing with large or heavy items a team of trained staff is enlisted to carry out the move.

- **Packing**

Documents must be packed in such a way that they will not be compromised or damaged during the journey. They should be protected from sudden jolts, excessive vibration, pests, and environmental factors such as wind and rain, and spikes in humidity and temperature. Packing for transport is assessed on a case-by-case basis. Documents should be carefully wrapped and placed into sturdy containers which can be sealed and moved without difficulty. Vulnerable or fragile documents should be protected with padding, boxes, and additional packaging as needed. Careful consideration should be given to the unpacking process in order to minimise the risk of accidental damage on arrival. Vulnerable items should be marked on the outside of the box. In addition, materials which pose a risk to the safety of the records, such as chemicals, must not be transported simultaneously.

- **Labelling and Tracking**

Each transit container should be addressed clearly, and all boxes and packaging should be labelled with the relevant reference numbers. Production slips must be completed and filed correctly, and documents should be signed in and out of the transit logbook. All items transferred to and from Conservation or Digitisation are logged on the Conservation and Digitisation record sheets as well as having their locations updated in the catalogue.

- **Vehicles**

Use of private vehicles is discouraged, and pool cars or hire cars should be used to transport archive material. Pool cars and hire cars are managed by external contractors and should be

thoroughly checked before use. Compromised vehicles should not be used at any time. Vehicles must be fully covered with windows closed to ensure that records are protected from exposure to weather, excessive light, extreme fluctuations in humidity and temperature, and other risks such as theft.

- **Security / Health and Safety**

Original records will not be left unattended in a vehicle. The safety of staff must be taken into account when transporting records. To ensure the safety of both staff and documents, a risk assessment will be carried out in advance of any transit taking place which involves a large quantity of materials. With regard to the transportation of small quantities of material, it is the responsibility of the driver to minimise risk and ensure that reasonable security measures are adopted.

- **Loading and Unloading**

When transporting a large quantity of material, boxes should be packed into plastic containers or carefully stacked onto pallets and transported within a suitable van or lorry. Records should be packed carefully into vehicles to ensure that the movement of the vehicle will not damage them. On arrival, the staff member should transport only what can be carried comfortably and safely. Any remaining records should be left securely in the car. During loading and unloading it is preferable to place documents onto a suitable trolley to minimise the risk of personal injury, and to prevent the accidental damage of records from poor handling or dropping.

2.7 – Digitisation

Digitisation describes creation of digital copies (surrogates or facsimiles) of archive material by the scanning and photographing of books, maps, plans, drawings, manuscripts, prints, negatives and slides, and the collection cataloguing and filing of associated metadata.

- **Internal:**

A digitisation program is currently underway at Cumbria Archives. Through digitisation we are creating a valuable and enduring online resource for both scholars and members of the general public. We are committed to maintaining and extending our digitisation program; Digitisation underpins our preservation strategy by allowing us to increase public access to information, whilst reducing the need for original material to be handled directly.

- **External:**

Cumbria Archives will digitise historic records on behalf of private clients and external organisations, subject to copyright and in return for appropriate fees.

2.8 – Salvage Planning

A disaster response plan for each archive centre has been created. These Salvage Plans are reviewed regularly and updated where necessary. All relevant members of staff are given a hardcopy of the salvage plan, and a digital copy is filed on the networked server. Salvage materials are stored in boxes located in each of the four archive centres and the archive store. Each box has an inventory printed on the lid, and the contents are regularly checked. Practical training for all staff in responding to disaster situations is provided annually.

3. Remedial Conservation

Remedial conservation describes those interventions which are applied to promote the chemical and physical stabilisation of materials, in order to extend their useful life. Remedial conservation involves the hands-on treatment of items from the collection. This work can be time-consuming and involves such things as the cleaning and consolidation of books and documents, the humidification and flattening of rolled plans and manuscripts, the lining of maps, and the strengthening of fragile and / or torn documents. When repairing a document, we endeavour to retain as much of the original as possible, whilst ensuring that long-term stability and accessibility are maintained.

3.1 – Decision to treat:

Remedial conservation will be undertaken when necessary to ensure the long term safety of vulnerable material. The decision to repair a document will take into account the historical importance of the item, its condition, and the cost implications. Consideration will also be given to the needs of the researcher and the level of use which the document is expected to sustain in the future. If a digital surrogate can be produced, interventive treatment may be avoided and access to the original restricted to preserve the item.

3.2 - Practitioners:

Cumbria Archives has professionally trained archive conservators on staff. Where possible, remedial conservation work will be undertaken by one of these conservators. However, externally sourced contractors may be employed when resources permit. To ensure the long-term safety of the collections, only appropriately qualified and experienced conservators will be employed.

3.3 – Documentation:

Before any work takes place, a mutual agreement will be reached with regard to the approach and the treatment of items. All conservation work will be documented using the specialist archive management software and added to the object's permanent record. Reports are created for each item which is treated, and these reports are linked to the catalogue record. In addition, photographs and technical notes on the treatment will be kept by the Conservation Unit for their records.

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