

RECORD OFFICE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND RUTLAND PRESERVATION POLICY

PROVISION OF THE SERVICE

The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is provided by Leicestershire County Council in partnership with the City of Leicester and County of Rutland. This service is the means by which all three local authorities meet their legal responsibilities to collect, care for and provide access to records.

Preservation Policy Statement

The Record Office **preserves and conserves** all of the significant recorded material relating to the life and history of the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland, including the City of Leicester held by the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. All preservation and conservation work will be reflect the **best current methods and practice** available and carried out with due attention to the **needs of the material preserved**, as well as those of **the community we serve**.

Explanation:

1. Preserves:

The National Archives Preservation Policy defines preservation as 'any activity or treatment undertaken to relevant standards to stabilise the physical or chemical condition of archives, to prolong its life, to enhance its value or improve accessibility by non-interventive means' [eg boxing or encapsulation.]

Strong rooms, Environment and Emergencies

The safety and security of its deposited material is of paramount importance to the Record Office; as reflected in this policy and the policies on *collection* and *access*.

The Record Office strong-rooms were constructed to conform to BS5454, since amended to PD5454. The initial principle of thermal inertia is now supplemented with a controlled and constantly monitored environment which maintains a temperature and relative humidity conforming to current guidelines. The strong rooms are air chilled and have fans to circulate air; the machinery for which is maintained regularly. There are no windows which eliminates any solar gain (heat) and U.V. light, as well as any potential security issues from unauthorized access.

Storage within the strong-rooms is customized to suit the material. It includes appropriate shelving for boxes, rolled items, large flat items and non-standard document sizes. Shelving is of suitable quality and durability. Where appropriate archival items are stored in protective packaging and the material is subject to regular inspection and re-packaging where necessary.

The buildings and plant are maintained by the Property Services of the Leicestershire County Council which responds appropriately to requests for remedial work. The Record Office has pest control maintenance in place, also subcontracted by Property Services.

The Record Office's single out-store is on the County Hall site at Glenfield. The storage is not to the highest archival standard; which is reflected in the type of material allocated to storage there. The environment and security of the store is monitored by Record Office staff, though both fall directly under the control of Property Services. This is a temporary measure pending a buildings review.

Searchrooms

Preservation of the collections is an important and constant factor in the public service offered through the Record Office search-rooms. Researchers are under constant invigilation, in part to ensure the appropriate handling of material issued from the strong-rooms. This aspect of the invigilation is advised on by the conservator; who occasionally undertakes search-room duties, in part to ensure adherence to guidelines.

Handling aids are available in the search-room, including weights, book cradles/cushions and nitrile gloves. The conservator is available for consultation regarding preservation issues occurring in the public areas. Records will be made available according to the *Access and Collections* policies and this *Preservation* policy.

The preservation of the archival material held is considered to be paramount. As a last resort, access will be refused if items are too damaged or fragile, though every effort is made to accommodate researchers through the use of surrogates or special, supervised access.

Collections care

This is maintained through Continuing Professional Development. Training and refresher sessions are given to new staff, and volunteers in handling and packaging of records. The conservator is heavily involved in the planning of an annual 'stock-taking' week's closure, which enables important but time-consuming, or labour intensive, work to be done on the maintenance of collections. The annual closure of the Record Office in order to undertake a comprehensive audit, also enables training *en masse*. This often contains a conservation or preservation element, arranged with or by the conservator.

2. Conserves:

The National Archives Preservation Policy defines conservation as 'any activity or treatment undertaken to relevant standards to stabilise the physical or chemical condition of archives, to prolong its life, to enhance its value or improve accessibility by interventive means '[eg washing, leafcasting, rebinding.]

Documentation, treatments, and assessment of new material.

All routine preservation and conservation work is fully recorded. Currently this is on the Conservation database of the Record Office's CALM system. Significant, specialist, or pioneering conservation work, as well as paid projects carried out for external clients may be documented further, with a photographic record and written report. Historic records of

conservation work, held on 'work cards' dating back to the 1950s, have been preserved and are being added retrospectively to the CALM system, to provide a single, coherent, searchable database of all conservation work and treatments.

All conservation treatments conform to current accepted conservation and archival practice. As such, they are minimal in extent and appropriately sympathetic to the material being conserved and respect the integrity of the historical document. Repairs are left deliberately detectable but not obtrusive. Treatments do not obscure written text, nor is missing text or images 'filled in' even if known. Old, inappropriate repairs will be removed or rectified if they are causing harm and may be if their effect is to obscure text.

All new conservation work is 'reversible' or removable if required. All conservation materials and procedures meet current archival standards to avoid harming the archives, and environment. This said, repairs are also as long lasting as possible, partly as a means of efficient working but more importantly to avoid unnecessary manipulation of archive material.

All newly accessioned archive material is subject to inspection by the conservator. This ensures that any immediately necessary treatment or remedial work (such as care of fragile or oversize items, removal of glazed frames, etc.) is carried out and that new accessions infested by insects, or which are simply dirty, damp or mouldy, are dealt with by the conservator as soon as possible and kept away from the strong room until then.

3. Best current methods and practice:

There are always new techniques and ideas in this field. It is vital therefore that conservation and preservation work is subject to constant review and record; to ensure that correct techniques are applied and that alternatives may readily be applied where appropriate in the future.

Conservation management, goals and the community.

The Record Office maintains a fully equipped conservation unit with at least one full time, conservator, under the direction of service managers. The conservator will be a qualified person accredited by ICON [Institute of Conservation] or the ARA [Archivists and Records Association] and administered by those professional bodies and allowed to use ACR [Accredited Conservator-Restorer] after their name.

The Record Office is keen to ensure the wider community and other holders of archival material have access to expertise and advice, as to how best to conserve and preserve the material they hold. As such the conservator will respond to enquiries for advice and consultation from the community. In addition they will seek to forge links with volunteers, community groups, local universities, libraries and museums to provide advice, reports, help with funding bids and conservation work where possible. Queries, advice and conservation will be logged and dealt with in a timely manner, in accordance with Record Office practice. Extended advice or project work will be charged for according to usual Record Office rates for professional advice and guidance.

Preservation is at the heart of the archival process from acquisition to access and as such is regarded as a responsibility of everyone in the organisation. The conservator works with all other staff to maintain and preserve the collections. There is no point in collecting archival material without the firm intention that it should be and always remain usable and accessible. This does not however mean that surrogates or other alternatives to the use of original documents will not be deployed as part of the preservation programme.

It is the intention to complete and maintain a *Benchmarks for Collections Care* assessment, which will provide a basis for future preservation decision making.

There is a dedicated budget for 'Maintenance of collections', deployed by the conservator (under the direction of the Senior Archivists) for the purchase of new conservation materials and equipment. A separate budget is used for the creation of surrogate copies.

4. Needs of the material preserved:

Our first duty is the preservation of the records in our care. Where use by the public is likely to cause an unacceptable level of damage to documents, alternative means of access will be considered and provided where possible.

Surrogates

The Record Office recognizes that customers want and need to see original documents which are both exciting to use and important evidentially. The records held have usually been created locally and their care is paid for by the community. Therefore we do not believe that the use of surrogates should completely replace access to originals. However, where records receive heavy use, or are fragile, the creation of surrogate copies to maintain or facilitate access will be considered. The final decision to create surrogates or insist upon their use in preference to the original rests with the senior Record Office staff but the conservator and all staff are expected to take an active part in making recommendations on use of surrogate copies.

Mass digitization and the use of on-line platforms as a means of widening access are also actively used and promoted, in part because of their role in preservation. The Record Office is an active partner in several digitalization projects and it is expected that the creation and use of on-line digital surrogates will grow considerably in the future.

Copying

Provision of photocopies is subject to the Record Office's *Photocopying and Reprographics Procedures*, which have been prepared with the advice of the conservator. Digital photography is allowed in the search room by the public using daily or weekly permits and is overseen by search room staff. The conservator is always available for consultation in preservation matters relating to handling issues in the search room.

5 Exhibitions and loans

Outside loans of original archival material are rare and always subject to careful consideration of circumstances – venue, security, legal implications, insurance and travelling arrangements. It is customary now, for example, to provide high quality digital facsimiles for display. Most outward loans are of material still owned by the depositor but even so, are

carefully planned and managed by senior Record Office staff with the advice of the conservator.

The Record Office carefully monitors and controls all material sent for loan. Records are assessed by the conservator for fitness for loan and travel. Conservation work may be undertaken prior to any loan and archive material issued with appropriate documentation, book/document supports and photographs. Exhibition cases may be provided or an onsite inspection made prior to loan. Transport of records must be secure and any handling issues are discussed in advance and appropriate paperwork prepared.

5. The community we serve

The Record Office takes the widest possible approach when defining our community of users and stakeholders and includes unborn generations whose needs we aim to anticipate. Preservation of the records held in any and all formats is an integral part of serving our community of users and stakeholders. For more information on the community we serve and access see our **Access Policy**

Appendix:

Key Standards:

- PD5454:2012 *Guide to the storage and exhibition of archival materials*, BSI. [note: PD5454 and PAS 198 are due to be replaced by a European standard BS/EN 16893 *Conservation of Cultural Heritage - New Sites & Buildings Intended for the Storage & Use of Collections* in 2016-17].
- PAS 198:2012 *Specification for environmental conditions for cultural collections*.
- BS4971:2002 *Recommendations: repair and allied processes for the conservation of documents*. [note: BS4971 is also under review]
- PAS197:2009 *Code of practice for cultural collections management*
- ICON Code of conduct 2014
- ICON Professional standards 2014
- Best Practice Guideline 4: *Preservation and Conservation: A guide to policy and practices in the preservation of archives*, Chris Pickford, Jonathan Rhys-Lewis and Jerry Weber, 1997 Society of Archivists
- *Benchmarks for collections care for museums, libraries and archives*, MLA 2002- a self-certification checklist tool.
- <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/benchmarks-in-collections-care-resources>
- *Preservation Assessment Survey [PAS]* <http://www.libraryarchivesurveys.org.uk/>

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