

RECORD OFFICE FOR LEICESTERSHIRE, LEICESTER AND RUTLAND COLLECTIONS 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.

Collections Policy Statement

The Record Office **collects (on loan or by donation, purchase or bequest), maintains and makes available to all any significant recorded material** relating to the **life and history** of the counties of **Leicestershire and Rutland, including the City of Leicester.**

Explanation:

- 1. Collects:** The aim of the Record Office is to provide a central point for the accumulation and safe-keeping of archival material, under professional supervision. To that end, the Record Office will accept material which is brought in, or arrange for the collection of material held remotely, which meets its criteria for collecting. From time to time, the Record Office will also actively seek out material, or appeal for material in order to complete or supplement a collection; or to plug gaps in holdings where they are weak or unrepresentative. Special events, commemorations, or perceived new local communities, groups or activities may also give rise to a special collecting effort or campaign to ensure that collections remain representative.
- 2. On loan or by donation, purchase or bequest:** The Record Office will routinely receive both *loans*, where a depositor has not the inclination, or in some cases the legal right to give away his or her records, and *donations* (including bequests). A *New Accession Receipt* form should be completed for each new deposit. The form specifies the nature of the deposit (i.e. loan, donation or 'other'), as well as recording any limitations required by the depositor upon use of the material deposited. The owners of documents may request certain controls on access as a condition of deposit; however, unduly restrictive conditions will be discouraged. The Record Office will not accept collections which have excessively onerous access

conditions attached or those which would conflict with the principle of equal access for all.

Historically, the Record Office has also received documents on 'permanent loan'; enabling custodians of archive material unable to alienate to find a secure home for it. This term is no longer used, although the principal of material not donated, yet held permanently without a right of withdrawal, is still recognised. A succinct guide to the nature of a loan and donation is provided on the *New Accession Receipt* form and a more expansive explanation is given to depositors if required or appropriate.

From time to time the Record Office may choose to purchase material, often seeking the assistance of allied bodies to obtain funding, or part funding, for it. From time to time large sums have been sought from grant awarding bodies, or from the partnership authorities of Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland. The Friends of the Record Office also make available smaller funds for the purchase of archival material when urgent necessity precludes external appeals. In every case the purchase must meet the terms of the Collections Policy and consideration is always given to the dangers of creating a 'market' for archival material, for the breaking-up of existing collections or individual volumes, or competing with other worthy bodies. Purchase of material is an important option where gaps in otherwise complete collections are to be filled, or in creating or 'priming' a new area of collecting, hitherto unrecognised or newly created. Purchase is never a first resort and is only used where conventional means of collecting has failed, or is either impossible or inappropriate.

Archive material may also be received in the form of a bequest. This may be by prior arrangement with the testator, but in any case will be subject to the same restrictions (including 'significance test') as any other deposit. Where appropriate (and in agreement with either testator or executors) material may be taken and passed on to another appropriate archive or sold for the benefit of the collection.

- 3. Maintains:** The Record Office undertakes to keep all deposited material safely and securely, subject to its policies on conservation and access. Archive material will not be accepted unless it can be safely stored and cared for.

- 4. Makes available:** The Record Office is subject to national legislation, which will affect the availability of certain classes of record. Similarly the provision of copies is subject to legal controls. Archive material will be made available in accordance with the **Record Office Access Policy**.

- 5. Significant:** The acceptance of any deposit is subject to a 'significance test'. In addition to the other basic requirement (that the material relates in some way to Leicestershire or Rutland) it is important that any item offered to the Record Office also meets a simple criterion of 'significance'. This is shorthand for a range of tests or considerations designed to ensure that scarce resources of storage space, staff time, and conservation material are not devoted to material which is unlikely to be of future use or interest to researchers.

The assessment of significance is made by qualified staff, applying judgement founded upon experience and training. Is the document likely to be of assistance to researchers in any field? Was it produced in circumstances which impart a historical value it did not possess when new? Does it offer clues to a sequence of local events, or cast an unexpected light upon typical or commonplace local existence. To be 'significant' the document must serve the purpose of the archive as a whole, in revealing 'the life and history of the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland', no matter how unexciting that life may be. Material which has little provenance and no 'story' to tell, may be rejected; though care is always taken to ensure that an unrecognised historical value has not been overlooked. Age is, of course, a trump card; since even the most unrewarding scrap becomes significant through longevity. Duplicate material is likely to fail the test, especially in cases where numerous copies are offered at the same time.

The 'significance test' will remain in force even where a special collecting effort (see 1 above) is being made. It may, of course, vary in its application where material is particularly sought. For example, where a campaign is mounted to strengthen the holdings from new, local communities, a mundane document in Latvian might be accepted, when one in English is rejected simply because many others are already held. In this case the 'significance' is partly the rarity of the document.

'Significance' must therefore be seen as a test applied for the benefit of future users of the Record Office rather than as one of administrative convenience. Its purpose is to ensure representative holdings of archive material for the future as much as (if not more than) to avoid the waste of scarce resources in the present. To take in too much can be as detrimental as to take in too little.

- 6. Recorded material:** The Record Office collects and houses a wide and growing variety of means of recording information, from the traditional written, typed and printed word on paper, parchment and other similar media, to sound and video recordings, photographic recordings and digitally stored data. It is essential that the Record Office's Collections Policy retains a flexibility of approach, to adapt to and embrace future developments in technology and habit. The Record Office is aware of the dangers of increasing obsolescence of some modern media and is active, with

other archives and archival organisations, in seeking out new ways of dealing with this threat.

The Record Office has always collected the broadest range of archival material. The holdings include photographic material of all types, from early daguerreotype and ferrotype images, to glass and plastic slides and transparencies, and prints and negatives on glass, celluloid and modern plastics. Moving images are also held on film and video formats, although most are routinely transferred to the Media Archive for Central England (MACE) in Lincoln.

Printed material has also always been taken in, hitherto in conjunction with library local studies collections. Since 1997 the Record Office has incorporated the Leicestershire Collection (formerly based at the Central Reference Library in Leicester). Following a review in 2013-14, the local studies function of the Record Office was confirmed and reinforced. The Record Office therefore continues to collect local studies material; including newspaper and periodical holdings, printed maps, a Local Authors collection, printed ephemera and a library of local printed books. There is also a significant collection of local sound recordings, both of commercial material and oral history interviews.

Exceptionally, small items will be accepted as part of an archival deposit, where there is a clear link in provenance between the artefact and archive material. Nothing will be accepted which will pose problems of storage or conservation, or where the item in question might be damaged by archival treatment. This Jenkinsonian principle (see Hilary Jenkinson *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London) 1937, p.7) applies, for example to badges, medals, coins, etc. but such acceptance will, in any case, be exceptional.

- 7. Life and history:** The collecting parameters of the Record Office are consciously broad, potentially including anything that reveals, affects or reflects life in the area covered by the three partner local authorities. This also includes the activities elsewhere of those born in the area or sometime resident in it. This deliberately wide limit is seen as permissive rather than restrictive, enabling researchers to have ready access to the widest and fullest possible range of resources – no matter how parochial or far flung their interests. The Collecting Policy is also intended to reflect contemporary as well as historical life, so that the archive material held remains responsive, relevant and reflective no matter how much local society or life changes.

- 8. Leicestershire and Rutland, including the City of Leicester:** The geographical area served by and represented in the collections held by the Record Office, may alter with changes in local government. From 1974 until 1997, the historic county of Rutland remained in existence, yet was administered as part of Leicestershire. From 1997, Rutland has been a unitary authority, historically termed a county yet actually a 'district council'; though throughout the boundaries of 'Rutland' have remained constant. The boundaries of both Leicester and Leicestershire have, however, been subject to frequent amendments, both in relation to each other and, in the case of the county, with bordering counties (in particular Derbyshire).

For clarity and consistency, the area covered by the Record Office's collections remains constant, as any territory which is, or has ever been in Leicestershire or Rutland. This is, however, subject to local agreements with bordering authorities' archives where a more practical solution is in the best interests of potential users. This is particularly relevant where a 'regional' approach has been adopted by the creators of archival material (such as both the established and some nonconformist churches, where the hierarchy has transcended county boundaries) or Leicestershire or Rutland records have been created by a business, which has branches, or even its headquarters, elsewhere. In such cases the Record Office will be prepared to take in, or otherwise acquire, such material whilst also remaining prepared to negotiate an appropriate alternative agreement for deposit elsewhere, with other interested archival bodies.

Links through relevant professional bodies and the National Archives are maintained, in part, to ensure that an appropriate channel for such negotiation and collaboration over appropriate places of deposit exists with other archives. Archive material is customarily taken in to be passed to other archives; just as material is received as part of an informal, widespread, reciprocal arrangement. Material is also received from archives re-evaluating their holdings, or institutions (such as the former British Record Association) processing large deposits taken in purely for distribution.

The Record Office also regularly receives Public Records - national archive material of local relevance, with the approval of the National Archives. Other general material from other sources will be collected where there is a clear local significance. This is particularly so in the case of local studies material, where a published memoir might include important reflections upon life in Leicester, or a collection of essays might be acquired where one or two deal with the local scene.

9. Review of this policy

No policy can cover every eventuality in perpetuity. The statements in this policy are subject to periodical review, to ensure that they remain relevant and appropriate. This may be undertaken annually or in response to a specific need or event such as new legislation.

All managers and staff are expected to act with integrity and in a professional manner at all times, seeking to find solutions in the spirit of the policy, where it fails to give specific guidance. Any shortcomings or useful additions should be highlighted as soon as possible.

The Record Office aims to maintain policies which are current and living documents, supporting a flexible approach to service provision rather than rigidly dictating it. They will enshrine our values and guide our actions; thereby providing a clear indication of what we will do and how we will act.

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