

Cumbria Archive Service

Collections Care Policy

Mission and Commitment

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. Cumbria Archive Service (CAS) is responsible for ensuring that historic documents are safely stabilised and stored for the benefit of the public today and for future generations. We are committed to meeting the standards which are set out in BS4971 and EN16893. Our collections are at the core of our service. Therefore, 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 CAS are cared for and managed in a consistent and safe way. This policy provides a framework for CAS, 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. These surveys provided CAS 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 strongrooms 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.

1.2 – Conservation Team Structure:

The conservation team consists of one full time Senior Conservator, one full time Conservator one full time Digitisation Technician post and one full time Preservation Assistant. 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. However, we are also responsible for looking after the holdings of the other three archive centres in Barrow, Kendal and Whitehaven.

1.3 - Packaging:

An ongoing project is underway which aims to increase the number of documents which are housed within archival-quality packaging materials. 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 providing adequate storage and physical protection, monitoring and controlling environmental conditions, establishing safe handling and suitable transit procedures, creating digital surrogates, and preparing for disaster scenarios.

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 to the Senior Archivist or Senior Conservator and the facilities management team. 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 to clean storage and display areas in a way that is not detrimental to the collections. Chemical-based commercial cleaning products are avoided 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, these items are quarantined until all risk of contagion has passed. 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**

Document storage areas are monitored using sticky insect traps. These are checked regularly. If pests are discovered, these are examined and identified, so that the risk posed to the collections can be accurately assessed. If and when problem is discovered, the affected area is monitored to ensure that the source of the problem is identified. Appropriate action is then taken to eradicate the pests.

2.3 - Environmental Monitoring:

The environmental conditions within all storage and display areas are monitored continuously. Digital loggers 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, so that our holdings are preserved for generations to come.

2.4 - Environmental Controls:

- **Temperature and Relative Humidity Levels**

CAS 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*. Within the majority of our strongrooms, the environment is controlled by a bespoke air conditioning system. This helps us to arrest the deterioration of vulnerable and fragile documents. The climate within each of the main strongrooms is monitored by the conservation unit to ensure that the temperature is consistently between 13-20 degrees Celsius and that the relative humidity is between 45-60%. At Carlisle Archive Centre there is a bespoke cool store, which is set up to receive photographic and audio visual material from across the county. The environmental parameters for our cold store are stable conditions in the range of Temp: 5 - 15 degrees Celsius and RH: 28 - 40%. Professional assistance is called immediately should the environmental conditions become unstable.

- **Display Cases**

We hold three or four exhibitions each year in atrium of Carlisle Archive Centre, to display documents from our collections. The archivist, assisted by a conservator, selects the most suitable documents. Those chosen are then prepared and mounted appropriately, and placed into one of the bespoke Click Netherfield display cases. The cases are secure and are positioned to avoid excessive vibrations, sources of strong light, radiators and external walls. 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, and damage from accidental water ingress, holdings will be housed in acid-free boxes. Where this is not possible, for example due to the size of an item, a Tyvek[®] cover 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.

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 CAS 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 produced 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.

2.7 - Records in Transit:

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 the document must be deemed fit for travel by a conservator. In addition, the borrower must guarantee that the document will be stored in a suitable and secure environment, and that it will not be handled inappropriately. CAS 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.

- **Training**

As part of the induction process CAS 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, and environmental factors such as wind and rain. 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 by enclosing them within suitably padded boxes. Careful consideration should be given to the unpacking process in order to minimise the risk of accidental damage on arrival. 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 log-book.

- **Vehicles**

Vehicles must be fully covered to ensure that records are protected from exposure to weather, excessive light 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 the scanning and photographing of books, maps, plans, drawings, manuscripts, prints, negatives and slides, i.e. it refers to the creation of digitally produced surrogates and facsimiles.

- **Internal:**

A digitisation program is currently underway at CAS. 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:**

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

2.8 – Disaster Planning

A disaster response plan for each archive centre has been created. These are reviewed regularly and updated where necessary. All relevant members of staff are given a hardcopy of the disaster response handbook, and a digital copy is filed on the networked server. Salvage materials and disaster response boxes are located in each of the four archive centres. 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 periodically.

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 endeavor 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 only 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.

3.2 - Practitioners:

CAS has two professionally trained archive conservators. Where possible, remedial conservation work will be undertaken by a member of the conservation unit. 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 collection management system and added to the object's permanent record. Reports are created for each item which is treated, and these reports are linked to the object record.

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