

Gloucestershire Archives @ The Hub

Collections Care Policy

1. Policy statement and purpose

This policy explains why and how we keep the collections in our care safe and available for public access. It provides a framework for maintaining our collections in the best possible conditions so that they are preserved for the long term.

2. Scope

The policy applies to the physical preservation of archives and other collections in our care at Gloucestershire Archives. This excludes digital archives for which we have a separate policy.

3. Terminology

Archives are the record of everyday activities of governments, organisations, businesses and individuals. Archives may take many different forms – handwritten, typed, printed, photographic or electronic – and include audio-visual material such as video and sound recordings. As authentic and reliable records, they are preserved permanently because of their evidential and historical value.

Preservation is the retention and maintenance of material over time

Collections Care is the management of all risks to the collections, including those from the collection items themselves and other collection items, physical forces, thieves and vandals, dissociation, fire, water, pests, pollutants, light, incorrect temperature and incorrect humidity

Conservation is the direct application of interventionist remedial treatment and non-interventionist preventive measures to arrest material deterioration, and promote the physical preservation and accessibility of an item or collection.

4. Background

Gloucestershire Archives gathers archive collections and local and family history resources to ensure they are kept secure and made accessible.

We are an accredited archive service recognised by The National Archives as the place of deposit for public records relating to Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire.

We are a Gloucestershire County Council service. By agreement, we also provide an archive service for South Gloucestershire Council and are the appointed Record Office for the Diocese of Gloucester.

We are a lead partner in the Gloucestershire Heritage Hub, a network of local people and organisations created in 2017 with a common interest in our historic county's documented heritage. The network benefits from Hub facilities at Alvin Street, Gloucester and a Hub website, and its members support each other to gather, keep and share their personal and community archives.

5. Preservation principles

- Archives will be preserved in perpetuity
- All aspects of their original format, their historical, textual, pictorial and physical nature will be preserved wherever possible
- Risks to collections will be assessed, and measures put in place to control them
- Preventive conservation measures will be employed to protect and preserve collections and individual items
- Passive environmental control measures will be used where possible to reduce environmental impact
- Remedial conservation treatments will be applied where there is an identified and prioritised need. No extensive intervention will be carried out without the owner's permission
- All treatment will be restricted to the minimum necessary to stabilise an item/collection and make it fit for use or copying
- Original material will be made accessible, or where there is a high demand a surrogate copy of the item may be provided to protect it from excessive handling. Surrogate images may be available online

6. Storage

Our collections are maintained in secure storage areas specially designed to maintain humidity and temperature levels consistent with the long-term preservation of archival materials as set out in nationally recognised standards (see 13. References). The storage areas are approved by The National Archives. We monitor them regularly to ensure they continue to meet the required standards. Regular deep cleaning is undertaken and a pest management programme is also in place.

7. Handling and using records

Staff and volunteers receive appropriate training in caring for records. Our customers may access records only under supervision and are expected to comply with our published research room guidelines. We provide advice and appropriate book and document supports to ensure safe handling of records. Customers may be required to consult copies to avoid damage to original records.

8. Emergency planning and response

We have a full emergency plan, which outlines the measures adopted to reduce the risks of an emergency situation and, should one occur, those for immediate reaction and recovery. The emergency plan is regularly reviewed, tested and updated, at least annually.

We carry out business continuity planning as part of the wider Gloucestershire County Council business continuity strategy.

9. Processing of newly acquired archives

Preliminary preventive measures are put in place when a collection is acquired. Collections are checked for damp, mould, and insect infestation, and appropriate action taken. Collections are put in protective low acid/acid-free boxes, and outsize material is specially supported and/or wrapped.

10. Selection for further treatment

Individual documents/collections may require further preventive measures, interventive conservation treatment and/or copying. Work is prioritised according to the amount of use that the document/collection receives or is expected to receive, whether it is completely unfit for use and/or if there is a special need such as preparation for an exhibition.

Treatment is given according to the type of damage.

Particularly large collections or those in poor condition are treated as individually managed projects. We will seek external funding to support such projects. Staff, volunteers and customers are encouraged to report any signs of damage to records. Surveys are also carried out to assess the current physical state of holdings. This data is used to inform preservation and conservation planning.

11. Collections care and conservation principles

All risks to collections will be assessed, and measures put in place to control them. Conservation practice aims to arrest or slow the rate of deterioration through understanding its mechanisms and applying scientifically-investigated treatments and preventive measures to stabilise and preserve the original physical object.

Conservation includes examination and assessment, documentation, preventive measures, remedial treatment, and sympathetic repair where it is necessary in order to achieve stabilisation. All interventive work is subject to formal approval following a consideration of other options, risk assessments and a justification for the proposed course of action. No attempt is made at restoration, as any material introduced must be distinguishable to avoid the possibility of compromising or falsifying the original material evidence.

Any approved interventive treatment will be carried out in accordance with the following general principles of archive conservation:

- All processes aim to preserve the integrity of the original document. Wherever possible the three-dimensional nature of a document will be retained, and the original format and appearance preserved. This also includes incidental items, such as early pins and needles, and debris found in bound manuscripts like quill clippings, and botanical specimens

- All items are individually assessed and only the minimum treatment sufficient to stabilise them will be undertaken.
- No written evidence is concealed or removed, and no missing text 'filled in'.
- All repairs are detectable but not obtrusive.
- Sympathetic materials are used for repair to avoid stresses and distortion – 'like with like'.
- Any new materials added are removable.
- No action is taken that precludes future examination, treatment or analysis.
- All materials and procedures used for preventive or remedial treatment meet British or international standards and/or current conservation requirements for suitability of purpose, in order to avoid introducing harmful components to documents, users, or the environment, and to maximise performance over the long term.
- A full conservation record is kept of all intervention treatment. It will be made accessible where required. It includes a description of the materials and structure of the object prior to treatment, an assessment of its condition including the results of any diagnostic tests, a consideration of the options for treatment as appropriate, and a report of all treatments carried out and all chemicals, materials, and processes used.

12. Roles and responsibilities

Our accredited conservators are responsible for planning and carrying out the collections care, preservation and conservation activities that support the aims of this policy. Tasks are planned and prioritised in liaison with the Collections Development Manager & Deputy.

Conservation treatments (or 'interventions') are only undertaken by appropriately qualified conservators, or by those trained by, and under the supervision of, appropriately qualified conservators. Any intervention work is undertaken within an ethical framework to ensure that the intrinsic nature of a document is not altered, and that recognised professional standards are adhered to.

Some preventive tasks such as providing protective enclosures may be undertaken by other staff and/or volunteers, provided they are trained and/or supervised by a conservator.

Gloucestershire Archives collections care and conservation staff are expected to continually review their conservation practice in the light of ongoing research and development in the

field, and to interpret the Collections Care Policy according to professional standards of current thinking and practice.

13. References

This policy should be read alongside other related Gloucestershire Archives policies, to be found at www.goucestershire.gov.uk/archives/policies/

Other related guidance includes:

National government policy on archives

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/Archives-Unlocked-Accessibility-Version.pdf

Supporting standards:

- PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management,
- PAS 198: 2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections,
- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections;
- Benchmarks in Collections Care 2.0 published by Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2011. Editor Alex Dawson.

14. Review and Revision

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

Document control

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Version history – Preservation Policy

Version	Version date	Summary of changes
1.0	August 2006	New policy (minor amends made between 2007 to 2009)
1.1	March 2010	Reviewed and amended following changes in corporate style. Approved by Libraries Senior Management Team.
2.0	Sept 2014	Reviewed and revised to include risk management approach and compliance with new standards. Some minor amendments and re-formatting.
	Oct 2017	Amalgamated with Collections Care and Conservation Policy to form Collections Care Policy.

Version history – Collections Care and Conservation Policy

Version	Version date	Summary of changes
1.0	2009	New 'Conservation' policy (minor amendments 2010-2012)
2.0	Sept 2014	Reviewed, amended and re-titled as 'Collections Care and Conservation' to reflect developments in this approach. Updated to comply with new standards PD5454 and PAS. Other minor amendments, updates and re-formatting.
	Jan 2018	Amalgamated with Preservation Policy to form Collections Care Policy.

Version history – Collections Care Policy

Version	Version date	Summary of changes
1.0	Jan 2018	Preservation Policy and Collections Care and Conservation Policy amalgamated to create Collections Care Policy. Also changed to reflect transformation of service to leader of Heritage Hub network. Change of job titles. Also to clarify the requirements for interventionist conservation, including the use of professionally qualified and accredited conservators, and the requirement for formal approval of justified treatments. Updates to Standards and references.
1.1	Oct 2020	Standards, job roles and links updated. Passive storage principle added.

Date of next revision: 2023